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THE VENUS OF CADIZ



FISGUILL



✓





THE VENUS OF CADIZ

An Extravaganza

BY

~~RICHARD FISGUILL~~

Author of *Mazel*

psend. of

R: H: Wilson

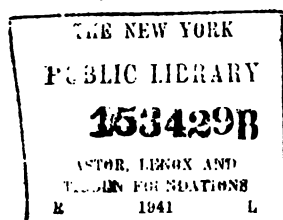


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THE VENUS OF CADIZ

CHAPTER I.

COLONEL NORRIS was as laconic as usual, not even giving his address. He had written four letters in twelve years.

"The Colonel means a million francs," explained Captain Malepeste. "His letter was addressed to me, and he knows I always count in francs."

"The Colonel means a million marks," replied Captain Bisherig. "He began his letter: 'Dear Malepeste *and* Bisherig,' and I don't believe Colonel Norris would think in francs when he had me in mind."

"But the Colonel is an American," observed Gertrude. "Don't you think it would be more natural for him to count and think in dollars — a million dollars?"

"No, I do not," replied Doctor Alvin. "I believe all of you are wrong. The Colonel is in Aus-

tralia. His business relations are doubtless with English houses. And in my opinion he means pounds, English money—a million pounds sterling.”

“Why, that would make five million dollars!” exclaimed Gertrude.

“Twenty million marks!” ejaculated Captain Bisherig.

“Twenty-five million francs!” echoed Captain Malepeste.

“That is what it would be,” assented Doctor Alvin, “and that is what the Colonel means, I feel sure. Nor am I surprised. Norris is a man of remarkable business instincts. He is as cool and collected on the floor of a stock exchange as he was on the field of battle. Then he had every incentive to make a fortune. And he has made one, take my word for it.”

“Nom d’une pipe!” exclaimed Captain Malepeste. “We will all go to Paris, and buy a *hôtel* on the Champs-Élysées!”

“We will do no such thing,” objected Captain



Bisherig. "Your modern Babylon is no place for respectable folks to live in."

Captain Malepeste retorted:

"Well, if you think we should be willing to put up with more than one 'Dutchman,' and live in Germany — God forbid!"

Captain Bisherig and Captain Malepeste retired to the Music Room that they might settle with swords the question of the respective merits of Germany and France. Gertrude followed in the capacity of second and surgeon to both men. Susan and Doctor Alvin remained alone. Catherine had retired to her bed-room.

"So papa is coming back with a fortune," observed Dr. Alvin, affectionately. "And.... and what is our Susie going to do — give a ball, and invite the Governor of Kentucky?"

"If father comes back with a million, I am going somewhere to study art," replied Susan.

The reply came so quickly that Doctor Alvin was startled.

Susan had fought out her battles alone. Unperceived she had crossed the threshold of womanhood.

"Study art.... be an artist, when a girl is as pretty as you are, and heiress to five million dollars!" cried Doctor Alvin, laying aside the mask he had worn so long.

It was Susan's turn to be astonished. She looked at her guardian fixedly, expressing pain in her look.

At length, in a low voice, she said:

"I do not see why."

"Susan!" began Doctor Alvin.

Then he hesitated, as if in doubt as to whether he should continue.

"I do not see why," repeated Susan, in the same low voice.

Doctor Alvin passed his hand over his forehead. He resumed:

"Susan, your father is coming back shortly. My guardianship is ended. Your father made me swear on Julia's coffin, that I would discourage in you all thoughts of marriage until he returned. He was afraid you might follow in Julia's footsteps. I was to represent sentiment as sentimentality, substitute art for love, and prevent your fancy crystallizing into some man-inspired desire. I have kept my promise.

Your father will find you fancy-free, will he not?"

"Yes."

"But, Susan...." and Doctor Alvin's voice again expressed excitement. "But...."

Doctor Alvin's voice trembled so that he was obliged to start over again:

"Susan, you do not know what you are. You... you...are a beautiful woman. You are more beautiful than Julia was at the height of her beauty. You are more beautiful than your mother was...."

Doctor Alvin's voice echoed mournfully as if he were calling upon the dead.

"Susan, you have only to look upon men to conquer them. You can achieve with a gesture what artists accomplish with a masterpiece. What can artists do, other than quicken the pulse of sluggard humanity? But, Susan — God guide your power — you will make blood boil, heads reel, hearts throb until they burst, if so you will it. Art.... artists! There is no need of you studying art. Artists will study you. Have you never looked at yourself in the glass, child? Have you never, when.... when....

You have studied art with Malepeste, and you know what lines are. Have you never thought of studying your own lines? None of the great statues or paintings, of which Malepeste has the photographs, is so harmoniously perfect as you. Art! — You are the genius of art. I have influenced you into taking up various lines of work, that I might keep you from the pitfalls of love, until the proper time. But, now, my guardianship is ended. I have played a part. I must lay aside my mask. Susan, I have been deceiving you. Love is by all odds the greatest thing in the world. You must love. And you must let some one love you — some one of the many who will be ready to lay down their lives for you.... ”

CHAPTER II.

THE farm was in a bustle of excitement. Where should they go, what should they do, when the Colonel came, bringing a million? In the evening, after supper, villas were bought and sold. Seas were crossed in a private yacht. Then music-drunk or picture-haunted they lolled in furniture that spoke an epic, and sipped nectar, silver served.

“Nom d’une pipe!” exclaimed Captain Malepeste.

The good Frenchman spent a million every night.

Even Catherine rallied from her lethargy, influenced no doubt more by the approaching return of her husband, than by thoughts of the wealth he should bring. But Susan astonished everybody by remaining indifferent.

“That is the effect of her scientific education,” Captain Malepeste explained to Doctor Alvin. “Susanne has about as much sentiment as a blow-

pipe. I told you that girls ought not to study medicine and be taught to cut up cats!"

Captain Bisherig and Gertrude agreed with Captain Malepeste. And after a lengthy discussion it was decided, that in view of the Colonel's wealth and contemplated return, Susan should henceforth be subjected to the most womanly influences possible.

"Suschen ought to know how to dance," declared Captain Bisherig.

"Susanne ought to have some fine dresses," suggested Captain Malepeste.

Observed Gertrude:

"Oh, there are a thousand and one little things of which Susan is ignorant, and which will be a source of chagrin both to her and to her father when she enters society."

Doctor Alvin sighed, but acquiesced. And the sum of money, which had accrued from the rental of the mansion at New Orleans, was drawn upon to prepare Susan for society.

They communicated with Mrs. McPheeters, explaining to her the situation: Susan's father was

coming back with a million, and it was desired that Mrs. McPheeters find in New York some young woman of good character, familiar with the best society, who should be willing to come to the farm in capacity of companion and coach.

Mrs. McPheeters had little difficulty in her search. The New-York Stock Exchange turns out annually a number of excellent "companions." Not two weeks after the reception of the letter, Mrs. McPheeters dispatched to the farm, in a parlor car, one of the most delicious companions imaginable: Miss Lucile Wentmore.

Miss Wentmore had been christened "Lucile" when her parents were wealthy. She had also been educated at home and abroad during the golden age. But a Bear Attack on the Stock Exchange, just before her contemplated marriage, had swept away everything, her betrothed included. Lucile had been mourning eight months when her eye caught Mrs. McPheeters' advertisement.

Captain Malepeste met Lucile at the station — which consisted of a shed and ten feet of platform — and their meeting was cordial. Night had come on.

Lucile was in the last parlor car. Captain Malepeste patiently waited near a day coach for the companion to alight. No one seemed to be booked for the lonely shed. The train began to move slowly off.

However, as the vestibule of the rear parlor coach drew near, Captain Malepeste perceived commotion. The conductor was wildly gesticulating with a young woman, while the latter wept.

"But this is your station, madam!" Captain Malepeste heard the conductor say.

"I don't believe you," sobbed the young lady. "I don't see any station. There are no lights. . . . Oh, me! Take me back to New York!"

"But, madam, your trunks have been put off here. This is Cadiz, Kentucky. I am not responsible for Cadiz not having an electric plant. . . ."

Whereupon Captain Malepeste rose to the occasion. Something in the young woman's despair touched him. He forgot to say "Miss," and called out, in his best tenor voice:

"Is that you, Lucile?"

"Yes, yes, I am Lucile. Are you the Colonel?"

"Jump, child!" was all that Captain Malepeste replied.

And he extended his arms just as the vestibule of the moving car was in front of him.

Lucile jumped. The conductor slammed the door of the vestibule. The long train shrieked, bounded, then disappeared — leaving Captain Malepeste younger than he had been for twenty years, and Miss Lucile Wentmore frightened out of her wits.

Timid things nestle when they are frightened. Lucile deliciously nestled all in a heap on the Captain's breast, hiding her little head under his beard.

Captain Malepeste grew younger and younger. The perfume of violets, with which Lucile seemed saturated, intoxicated the Captain.

"Nom d'une pipe," he murmured, "the million has arrived!"

And like the wretched old bachelor that he was, Captain Malepeste did not once think of letting the incoherent young woman slip to a standing position where she might breathe and recover her wits. He simply tightened his hold, gazed at the stars overhead, and muttered:

"Nom d'une pipe, the million has arrived!"

Miss Wentmore had not entirely fainted, though she lay quite still. She was only exhibiting her skill in one of the thousand things which she should teach Susan. Lucile opened one eye, saw the stars through Captain Malepeste's beard, and murmured resignedly:

"Oh, Colonel...."

"I'm the Captain," explained the beard.

Forthwith a fluttering began, a scrambling, and even a scratching, which only ended when Miss Lucile Wentmore was distant from Captain Malepeste the length of a ten-foot platform. Then she cried:

"Brigand!" elegantly pronouncing the word on the last syllable.

"I'm not a Brigand," assured Captain Malepeste, also stressing the last syllable, "I'm the Colonel's representative."

"Then please be so good as to take charge of my trunks, and escort me to the Colonel. Here are my checks...."

Miss Wentmore tossed three pieces of brass in the direction of Captain Malepeste.

"Brigand! . . . and baggage-master!" whispered the Captain, awed, as he felt around in the dark for the checks.

When the three steamer trunks had been placed in the rear of the spring wagon, Miss Wentmore clambered gracefully to the seat, and observed:

"I will drive. Please be so good as to sit on the trunks and keep them from falling off. *You* needn't fall, either!"

Captain Malepeste had no words to qualify his last functions. He forlornly climbed to the top of the trunks, and watched her wrap the lap robe carefully about her.

"Straight down the road?" she asked.

"Straight down the road," he replied.

She gathered up the reins, whirled the buggy-whip about her head, as if it had been an English tandem whip, and sent the two horses galloping out into the darkness.

"She's going to break my neck. . . . and hers,

too," reflected Captain Malepeste, as he desperately clutched the top trunk.

But the horses knew the road. After an hour's drive, during which not a word passed between Miss Wentmore and Captain Malepeste, the horses stopped at a gate, and neighed joyfully. A loud, vibrating bray, which rent the darkness, came in reply.

"This is where we live," offered the Captain, descending from his perch to open the gate.

"What is that strange sound?" questioned the young lady from New York, referring to the last notes of the melancholy bray, which was now being echoed from hill to hill.

"That is a yodel," replied Captain Malepeste, opening the gate.

"What sort of a yodel?" asked Miss Wentmore, dubiously.

"The yodel of a jack," said Captain Malepeste.

"Don't you mean the roar of a . . . a . . . jack?" questioned Miss Wentmore, hesitating to drive in.

Captain Malepeste was puzzled for a moment. Then reflecting that the unearthly braying of a jack-

ass bore some faint resemblance to the roar of a lion, he hastened to explain :

“ The jack is a domestic animal with long ears. It is the father of the mule. And,” he added parenthetically, “ and it does not feed on ladies.”

Miss Wentmore did not desire further information. She proudly whirled her whip, after the English fashion, and sent her horses spinning through the gate, and on down the private road toward the house, leaving Captain Malepeste to walk one quarter of a mile.

“ I’d give my part of the million,” said the Brigand to the baggage-master, as he closed the gate, “ I’d give my part of the million if that blessed jackass would only take it into his head to jump the stable fence, and come half way to meet Miss Lucile Wentmore of New York City, braying as he came. . . . ”

But Lucile was not intercepted by the donkey or any other monster. She arrived in triumph at the house. Captain Bisherig was standing on the porch to greet her. He gallantly assisted her to alight; and he was on the point of introducing himself, and

asking where Malepeste was, when Miss Wentmore exclaimed:

“Oh, Colonel. . . .”

And she showed signs of hysteria.

“I’m the Captain,” replied Bisherig, supporting her on one of his fatherly arms.

“But. . . .” cried Miss Wentmore, now thoroughly disconcerted.

She was on the point of saying something naughty about captains in general and particular, when she espied the commanding form of Doctor Alvin, who issued from the doorway.

“Ah, there’s the Colonel. . . . Oh, Colonel!”

“I’m the Doctor,” explained the latter, in amazement, springing forward just in time to prevent Lucile from falling. Miss Wentmore had seen fit — to faint.

“Where’s Malepeste? What is the matter with this young woman?” cried Doctor Alvin.

Captain Malepeste hove in sight.

“Did the jackass jump the stable fence?” he asked, taking in the situation at a glance.

“Jackass!” exclaimed Doctor Alvin.

"Jackass!" cried Captain Bisherig.

Susan and Gertrude appeared.

"But she drove off and left me," expostulated Captain Malepeste. "She thought the jack was a lion."

"Malepeste, you're a bigger ass than the one in the stable," commented Captain Bisherig.

"But I really believe the poor thing has fainted," cried Gertrude, pointing to Lucile, "and she's so pretty! Here, Susan, help me. . . ."

"I'll carry her upstairs for you," offered Captain Malepeste, for once in his life, not heeding Captain Bisherig's insult.

"No, I can carry her," said Susan, taking Lucile from Doctor Alvin. "You'd better help about the trunks, Maly."

"Oh my," moaned Miss Wentmore.

CHAPTER III.

WHEN Lucile awoke next morning, the first thing she saw was a head of much tangled yellow hair which bent over her. The opportunity was too good to be lost. Miss Wentmore reached up, buried her hands in the soft fluffy hair, pulled the face toward her, and kissed it. The act was so unlooked for that the body supporting the yellow head lost its balance, and tumbled on the bed. Miss Wentmore loosed the fluffy hair, and took a hold lower down, hugging with all her might.

“Are you Susan?” she asked.

Susan laughed.

“Why don’t you kiss me?” questioned Miss Wentmore.

Susan obeyed, like a child.

“Not on the forehead, on my lips!”

“There!” . . . said Susan, still laughing.

“Now hug me tight!” directed Miss Wentmore.

"And," she continued, as Susan loosed her arms, "And hold on to me. I hear your heart beat.... thump! thump! thump! My what a bust! It shakes when you laugh. But hold to me, don't let me go!"

Susan straightened out on the bed, and drew Lucile's frail body to her. It was the first time in her life anybody had begged her for affection. And suddenly, without warning, Susan's pent girlhood broke forth....

Lucile felt herself caught up, as by a whirlwind....

Oh sob-rent, tear-dampened kisses!

It was heavenly. Miss Wentmore joined in, and cried to break her heart.

"I'm only twenty-four," she vowed to Susan.

She continued, and narrated the great story of her life, how rich her father had been, how much she had loved Jim. But the Bear Attack on the Stock Exchange had torn Jim from her arms. Jim would have to marry a rich woman. He needed the money in his business. She did not blame Jim. But she had loved him so!

"Once more.... for Jim!" she said, half laughing, half crying.

When Susan had embraced her for Jim, Miss Wentmore said:

"Now tell me about yours."

"About my what?" asked Susan.

"Your sweetheart."

"I never had any."

Lucile raised up on her elbow, and looked fixedly at Susan.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two."

"And you never had a sweetheart!"

"No."

"Get up and stand over there where I can see you," commanded Miss Wentmore.

Susan obeyed, her yellow fluffed hair more tangled than ever, her simple nightgown falling as cheap drapery over Parian marble.

"Oh, I had never seen you!" exclaimed Miss Wentmore, springing from bed, and drawing near Susan in wonderment. "And to think that I have

been there blindly hugging and kissing such a . . .
a . . . ”

Lucile experimented.

“ A . . . ”

Lucile was spell-bound.

“ A . . . queenly, glorious woman ! ”

Susan blushed.

“ Such hair . . . such feet ! ”

Miss Wentmore’s glance swept over Susan.

“ Such hands and arms ! Such a neck ! Such a breast ! And, oh, the hip lines, and the dimpled knees, the wrist-like ankles and arched little feet ! And what a back ! Ruth’s back, a breast for the Mother of the Gracchi, Cinderella’s feet, Hebe’s hands, Milo’s neck and mouth and nose, but hair and eyes that never came to Earth before, hair from Heaven — yes, once before ! Eve had this yellow, gold-spun, God-given hair — But eyes ! . . . Oh, the great black mournful eyes, the terrible eyes, haunting eyes, which did not come from Heaven, and could not come from Hell ! I know ! They came from Purgatory. You have suffered, Susan. You have waited in Purgatory a thousand years,

pure as an angel, proud as a queen. What were you waiting for?"

And though only the day before, Susan had reiterated to Doctor Alvin her intention of being an artist, she replied to Lucile, almost sobbing:

"But he has never come! He will never come! I do not even know him. He never will come!"

Her mournful eyes gave to the words a meaning which cannot be transcribed. Lucile caught the meaning. Perhaps only a woman could. Women are artists.

"He will never come!"

"Yes, he will."

"When?"

"To-day, perhaps. To-morrow. But he will come."

"How do you know?"

"Because.... because...."

Lucile took Susan's hands in hers, and kissed them.

"Because there's a king somewhere for every queen. He's sure to come. He may be down stairs now. I'm going to dress my queen. I'll arrange

her hair. Susan, if you're as good as you're beautiful, I am going to love you more than any woman ever loved another! I'll give you what Jim left."

Miss Wentmore found a dearth of regal garments for her queen. Susan's wardrobe consisted principally of calico. After Lucile had moulded Susan's fluffy hair into a diadem, Lucile wrung her hands in despair.

Put cotton on a queen! "Never!" she declared.

Susan laughed.

"Unstrap my trunk over there, please, your Majesty," commanded Miss Wentmore. "My things are too small for you. But I have a *matinée* which is tucked in all directions, pale blue. There it is on top. Give me the scissors, please, your Majesty."

Miss Wentmore ripped with the zeal of a skilled dressmaker. By breakfast time, the queen was arrayed in Lucile's brightest splendor: Lucile's rings, Lucile's brooches, Lucile's pale-blue silk *matinée*, cut low, Lucile's ribbons, and all the laces she had, along with a corset of the kind they like in New York,

"And do you think I'm going down to the breakfast table like that?" asked Susan, looking at herself in the glass.

"If you don't, you'll break my heart," replied Miss Wentmore, with tears in her eyes.

Susan saw that Lucile was in earnest.

"But what are you going to wear?"

"I intend to pose as the Goddess of Simplicity," replied Miss Wentmore. "Everything white, even my stockings. Not a jewel, save my eyes. Not a color, save my cheeks. By the way, Susan, how many captains and doctors are there in this garrison?"

"Three."

"All of them married, I suppose."

"No, only one married."

"Which one — Santa-Claus, Mephistopheles, or the Brigand?"

The queen laughed.

"Santa-Claus is the one who's married, if you mean the fat one. That's Captain Bisherig — Gertrude is his wife."

"Then the Brigand is not married," observed Lucile, thoughtfully.

"No, Maly is not married."

The mere thought of such a thing made the queen laugh.

"What's his name, *Maly*?" asked Lucile.

"Malepeste, Captain Malepeste."

"That's a funny name."

"He's a Frenchman."

"I don't like Frenchmen," declared Lucile.

"You ought to see Maly paint," suggested Susan.

"Is he a painter?"

"Yes."

"Still worse! I abhor artists of all descriptions. They never get beneath the surface of things. They judge your heart by your complexion."

"Captain Bisherig is a musician — a German."

"That's a little better. Musicians at least hear, in addition to seeing. They have two senses. And the Doctor? — He's a mysterious looking man. He looks like the incarnation of the spirit which peeps out of *your* eyes."

"He has been a father to me," replied Susan.

"You know I thought the Colonel was here until you told me a minute ago."

"No. It may be six months before he comes."

"Is the Colonel as handsome as the.... the others?"

"When he went away, he was still more handsome," answered Susan. "I was only ten years old, but I remember him distinctly — tall as Doctor Alvin, then something in his face that attracted you magnetically."

"You all have that," declared Miss Wentmore, "every blessed one of you! You're a remarkable family. You can't imagine how different you are from the people in New York. Up there they look at you and size you up, take your invoice, as it were, assuming that 'For Sale' or 'To Let' is written in your heart. I hate New York.... since Jim left me.

"But," continued Miss Wentmore, "how does it happen that all your men folks are colonels and captains and doctors? — I suppose it's because they're Kentuckians."

"None of them, except Doctor Alvin, was born

in Kentucky," explained Susan. "We came from New Orleans when Julia.... after our fortune had been lost."

"When Julia.... ahem.... after your fortune had been lost. The lost fortune is commonplace. I never knew a Southern family which had not lost a fortune. But *Julia*, that's interesting. What is the matter with Julia?"

"She was too pretty," explained Susan.

"My goodness, what a crime! Let's see, we have Frenchmen, Germans, Americans.... I suppose Julia was Spanish, Italian, Russian ——"

"Julia was my sister," replied Susan, quietly, without smiling.

"Forgive me, dear," pleaded Lucile. "I'm abominable. I've hurt your feelings."

"We don't talk about Julia," Susan explained.

She added, however, in the womanly way:

"Julia broke my mother's heart and wrecked three fortunes. That's why my father went to Australia."

"She *must* have been pretty!" exclaimed Miss Wentmore.

Susan briefly related the history of her family.

"And that's why I have been brought up like a man," she explained.

Miss Wentmore laughed.

"You . . . like a man!" she cried.

"That is what Captain Malepeste says. He did not want me to study Medicine."

"Shade of Esculapius! . . . Are you a doctor, too?"

"I studied with Doctor Alvin."

"Well," exclaimed Miss Wentmore, "so medicine is all you know!"

"I can analyze minerals," offered Susan.

"Indeed! Any other accomplishments?"

"Then I am an artist by profession, or rather I will be — and you do not like artists, either."

Susan smiled.

Lucile exclaimed:

"But, child, I thought you were a doctor and a mineralogist!"

"I am when I get tired thinking about Julia."

"And when you think about Julia, you paint?"

"Paint, write, play.... all that is art," explained Susan.

"And all *that* comes from Julia, does it?" asked Miss Wentmore, mystified.

"Yes, Julia is love. Love is despair. Despair is art — Love is passion. Passion is desire. Desire is vulgar — Only art remains.... I told you I had been brought up like a man!"

Susan was laughing. Her words contrasted strangely with the blue silk matinée.

"You have been brought up like.... a heathen," declared Miss Wentmore, reaching up and placing her arms around Susan's neck.

Then she commanded:

"Kiss me."

Susan obeyed.

"Better than that!" ordered Miss Wentmore.

Susan complied, laughing.

"Now say: 'Lucile, I.... *love*.... you,' and say it as I did."

Susan said it better, lifting Miss Wentmore from the floor, clasping her in her arms — and making the New-York corset crack distressingly.

"You.... you are just heavenly!" cried Lucile, as she regained her breath.

She added:

"You are heavenly all of you. You are.... You.... Do you know what you are — you and your colonels and your captains and your doctors, your millions and your gorgeous jack? You are what Jim would call an extravaganza. I've been wanting to see one in real life a long time. It's where you jump off the train into the woods, and get caught — by Major Malepeste.... "

"*Captain* Malepeste," prompted Susan, laughing.

"It's where you sit him on top of the trunks, and go whirling down the road, blookity! blookity! blook! Then the sound of a distant trumpet — or the yodel of a jack, it's all the same — and you falter. But two other arms support you.... hushed voices, camphor, white curtains, and a fathomless featherbed. In the morning Ruth comes, decked out solely in yellow sheaves. She talks medicine and chemistry, does Ruth, and she weeps; but when she hugs you, — shade of Romeo! when she kisses you, — shade of Juliet! she rips a brand new corset

up the back.... Once more, child, for Jim.... Now let's go to breakfast. I'm hungry as Doctor Mephistopheles looks."

Susan entered the dining room, blushing at the costume which Lucile had made her wear. Doctor Alvin turned pale.

"Hail to the queen!" announced Miss Wentmore.

"Your gracious Majesties!" replied Captain Malepeste, making a low bow, individually, to every woman in the room — ending with the cook, who came bringing hot biscuit.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS WENTMORE was very hungry — God bless her famished soul; God bless my own, and yours; God bless us all, who find it hard to love enough.

Miss Wentmore's thirst for affection was insatiable. She kissed Susan at night for Jim. Every morning she hugged Gertrude for Captain Bisherig. In the afternoon she stroked Catherine's hand, and made the invalid talk of Colonel Norris. In the evening Miss Wentmore appeared with short sleeves and low neck, one arm around Susan, the other about Gertrude's waist — and still a third, invisible, but palpable, which choked Captain Malepeste into idiocy.

The actions of the poor man became erratic, his words incoherent, his tenor songs numberless; then insomnia, bright cravats, bay rum, and other malignant symptoms. The epidemic spread. Captain

Bisherig was seen to wink at Gertrude — who was his wife. Catherine appeared one evening in the Music Room, wearing a famous black velvet gown which had graced the ball-rooms of New Orleans twenty years before. Susan finally consented to take lessons in dancing from Lucile; and in a short time she was gliding over the floor of the Music Room, in Doctor Alvin's arms, to the sound of Captain Bisherig's violin.

Miss Wentmore, in the capacity of pervading spirit, found her way into everybody's arms, and thence into their hearts — even into those and that of the cook.

"Honey," explained the latter, confidentially and metaphorically, to Lucile, "you does my heart good. You done brought back de good ol' times when white folks and niggers cut de pigeon-wing till mos' de crack o' day, den went to cure dere back-ache on de covenant of de Lord."

Miss Wentmore felt encouraged. She added riding to the recreations of the farm.

Fancy riding, where horses gallop and take fences at a bound, where smart men clasp their hands in

due humility to form a stirrup for a discreetly lifted foot, where dawn finds you in the saddle, pursuing over green fields the selfsame vision which haunted you at night — a fleck of color, a flash from paradise, quavered laughter, mock defiance: Catch me! Then the chorus beat on turf by horses' hoofs — wild, sweet chorus! And when she turns to smile at you, the sun comes up. Vanished, the mists. But on! on through the dew-decked morning, pursuing over green meadows what you followed in your dreams — and what will haunt you ever more — a fleck of color, a flash from paradise, quavered laughter, and the mock defiance: "Catch me, catch me, bold bad Brigand, if you can!"

But Captain Malepeste never caught her, and for an excellent reason. Miss Wentmore was an expert horsewoman; and she rode the wildest, meanest, and swiftest horse that was ever bred in Kentucky. His name was Daredevil. He was wont, among other things, to steal up behind the unsuspecting jack, and bite the latter's ears. For this reason Miss Wentmore had taken Daredevil into her affection. She

gave him lumps of sugar. Daredevil reciprocated. He loved Lucile with all the ardor of a mean horse. Miss Wentmore taught Daredevil how to kneel, thus doing away with the necessity of placing her foot on Captain Malepeste's humbly joined hands when she wished to get into the saddle. Captain Malepeste asserted that Daredevil while kneeling to receive the perfumed burden invariably winked at him. And it may be true. Daredevil *was* downright mean.

Susan rode Icarus, the champion jumper of the farm, who defended the jack from Daredevil, and punished the mules when he caught them tormenting calves. Doctor Alvin's mount, as well as that of Captain Malepeste, was an animal trained to harness. The Doctor stood no more chance in a race with Susan than did Captain Malepeste with Lucile. Santa-Claus, true to tradition, did not ride horseback. He arose in the morning, just early enough to have mint juleps ready for the return of the others.

"And what mint juleps!" exclaimed Miss Went-

more, sipping hers in ecstasy, as she watched the Brigand through the rim of her glass.

“And what fried chicken!” she exclaimed a few minutes afterward, as they went in to breakfast.

Then there was coffee, which Captain Malepeste brewed in a strange French machine, crispy hot biscuit of the cook’s creation, cream that looked like butter, butter that tasted like cream, and fruit — which they had watched from flower to maturity.

“This is life,” declared Lucile, who had never lived on a farm before.

And less and less often, Miss Wentmore took from her trunk a certain morocco-bound volume to set herself down to read.

Susan, like all those who have lived an inner life, was sadly lacking in curiosity. She had not observed that Miss Wentmore, after reading in the morocco-bound book, invariably returned it to her trunk. Nor had she noted that Lucile seemed a trifle more serious after these readings. Her question, therefore, was quite unpremeditated, one day, when coming upon Lucile with the morocco-bound volume in her hands, Susan asked:

"What are you reading?"

"A book," replied Lucile.

She added, regretfully:

"A hollow, empty, deceitful book, which paints a life that nobody ever lived. Would you like to read it?"

"What's the name of the deceit?"

"'Oak and Palm.'"

Miss Wentmore handed the mysterious volume to Susan.

"Is it fiction?" asked Susan.

"Quite so," replied Miss Wentmore.

"Who wrote it?"

"Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule. There's his picture — just before the title page."

"Is he a Frenchman?"

"Oh, no. He's an American all right," assured Miss Wentmore. "The name has been flaunted at New York for two generations; and it flourished, I'm told, for three generations previously, somewhere in South Carolina — 'Turnbull,' that's all 'tis in English. You know 'Turnbull' is derived from the French *Tourne-Boule*, 'turn ball.'"

"Why, the face is striking," said Susan, as her eyes fell upon the portrait of Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule.

"Somewhat, yes."

"And do you know," continued Susan, with unwonted emphasis, "it's strange, but he looks like the man I've been trying to paint."

"Indeed! Well, read the book, and tell me what you think of it."

Susan dropped into an armchair that stood near by. She scarcely moved during the rest of the afternoon.

Lucile had gone down stairs, made a splendid chignon for Gertrude's silver hair, rendering Captain Bisherig happy, and then she had gone off to the stable with Captain Malepeste, to see the hired men feed the stock. Captain Malepeste also was happy.

Lucile insisted on taking a pitchfork from one of the hired men, and filling Daredevil's rack with what she considered the choicest hay. Then she asked Captain Malepeste to enter the corn crib and look for an ear of red corn.

"I would go in there and help you," Lucile explained from the door of the crib, "but I'm afraid of rats."

"Do you know what negroes say about red corn?" asked Captain Malepeste, searching diligently among the clean husked yellow ears.

"Yes, that's why I want it."

"They believe that if you hang up an ear of red corn with a blue string, and say your prayers under it, dressed in white, you'll be married in as many days as there are grains on the ear."

"I believe that, too," declared Miss Wentmore. "I've already selected my blue ribbon. All I need is an ear of red corn."

"Then you want to get married," ventured Captain Malepeste, breathlessly, but wildly scratching in the darkest corner of the crib.

"Every healthy-minded young woman, who is unmarried, would like to marry," replied Miss Wentmore, diplomatically.

"I'm healthy-minded, too," pleaded Captain Malepeste, from the darkest corner of the crib.

"Then why don't you hang up an ear of red corn?" suggested Miss Wentmore.

"I haven't any blue ribbon," mourned Captain Malepeste.

"Find the corn, and I . . . I . . . "

Miss Wentmore coughed prophetically.

"What'll you do if I find the corn?"

Captain Malepeste stopped scratching and held his breath.

"I . . . I'll give you a piece of blue ribbon."

"A piece of the same blue ribbon that you're going to hang up yours with?"

She had fooled him so often that Captain Malepeste was skeptical. He desired to be certain.

"That depends," replied Lucile.

"Depends on what?"

"Depends on . . . But you've stopped searching! Find the corn, and I'll tell you."

"Here it is," replied Captain Malepeste, producing instanter from somewhere two ears of bright red corn. "Here they are! Now what does your giving me half your blue ribbon depend on?"

"On whether I have enough for both," replied

Miss Wentmore, snatching an ear from Captain Malepeste, and darting from the stable.

Captain Malepeste knew that pursuit on foot, as well as on horseback, was useless.

"What a vixen," he soliloquized. "She's mean as Daredevil."

He caught Daredevil's brilliant eye that peered at him curiously through the rack of hay, and Captain Malepeste protested:

"You black demon! I honestly believe that you're the devil himself."

The horse lowered his ears and showed his teeth. Daredevil was peculiar.

Lucile found Susan in the armchair, just as she had left her.

"Have you climbed the 'Oak and Palm?'" she asked.

"Yes," replied Susan.

"What do you think of the book?"

"The author is a genius."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. I'm going to write to him."

"Write to him!" exclaimed Miss Wentmore.

"Write to Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule — Turnbull!"

If dusk had not already crept into the room, Susan would have seen how flushed Miss Wentmore was.

"Why not?" asked Susan, simply. "If I give up all hopes of becoming a genius myself, I should at least like to know one."

"Susan!" Miss Wentmore reeled.

Susan caught her in her arms.

"What's the matter, Lucile?" she cried.

"Nothing. . . . " replied Miss Wentmore. "Nothing. I'm out of breath. I ran from the stable. . . . from Captain Malepeste. He wants me to give him half my blue ribbon toto hang up his ear of red corn, and. . . . and I don't know what to do. . . . I don't know what to do. . . . My God!. . . . Tell me what to do. . . . "

Susan understood the request as being directed to her. She replied:

"Lucile, dear, Maly is the best man that ever lived."

CHAPTER V.

WHEN Susan's letter reached Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule, through the intermediary of Mrs. McPheeters, it was July in the city of New York, ninety-five degrees in the shade.

Mr. Turnbull was fanning himself, and glaring successively at the various objects of an elegantly furnished bachelor apartment — glaring at a copy of Lord Leighton's "Hesperides," glaring at an etching of Piranesi, glaring at a Smyrna rug and the porcelain bust of a heartless woman, glaring finally at his own copy of "Oak and Palm," but glaring with especial ferocity at a cheap leather bank-book which was filled with entries — on the right.

"Bank-books," he muttered, "abominable bank-books, compiled by sweaty, uninspired hands, yet more potent than any that genius wrenches from a brain!"

He thought of his troubles:

Here he was, Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule, illustrious author of "Oak and Palm," praised of critics and envied of literary men, obliged to swelter as ordinary Turnbull throughout the blooming summer time in a stone-flagged city, which even his publisher had deserted! Everybody had gone. Everybody was sailing yachts, climbing mountains, and fishing for inspiration in the depths of woman's eyes. But he, the genius, was shut up in a winter-furnished flat, breathing the atmosphere of janitors, and thinking the thoughts of a dry-goods clerk! He could not even rejoin the Countess.

And why?

Because he did not have the money.

Oh, the freedom of a literary life.... go where you please, do what you please....

Mockery!

Go where you please, and it was: "Tickets, please!" Do what you please, and it was: "Pay or be damned!"

He could not even rejoin the Countess, unless he walked — and wore winter clothes.

Still there was that wretched publisher of his

meandering in Maine, and taking his family along!

His publisher had robbed him — he felt sure. His publisher had grown rich from the sales of "Oak and Palm," and left him, the author, buttoned up to the chin in a last winter's overcoat, to pass the summer at New York, and finish a new book by the fall.

How could he write with nothing to inspire him!

If he were only on the sea, wrapped in a rug, spray in his face, salt in his hair, rolling and pitching, wrapped in a rug; and between the swishing and swashing, some woman's voice, no matter whose, even that of the Countess — but spray in his face, salt in his hair, rolling and pitching on the ocean's breast, wrapped in a rug.... "Tickets, please!"

And the janitor slipped Susan's letter under the door.

Did he care to know her, the letter asked.

"I do not," replied Mr. Tourne-Boule, noting that the letter had been mailed at New York, and bore a New-York address — that of Mrs. Mc-

Pheeters. "I do not care to know anybody who stays at New York in the month of July."

She was what he had sighed for in "Oak and Palm," the letter went on to suggest.

"You're mistaken," said Mr. Tourne-Boule.

He was what she had dreamed in her soul.

"That may be," admitted Mr. Tourne-Boule, "but: 'Tickets, please!'"

Sacrilegiously he opened the porcelain breast of the heartless woman, and he stuffed Susan's letter therein. It was a fancy of his. The Countess had given him this porcelain bust; and she had told him that it was *woman*.

"Look," she had said, pressing a secret spring on the statue's bosom, which caused the porcelain folds to part, "you see it is hollow and empty . . . a woman's breast."

And all the effusions which he had received from unknown women readers, he had stuffed into this hollow porcelain bust. He was making a heart for the statue, he said. It was a fancy of his.

"These sentimental old maids," he murmured, referring to his unknown admirers, "if they were only

a trifle more practical, I should be pitching and rolling now — in wealth. Why don't they think of 'enclosures,' or take it into their gourd-like heads to express tenderness with a check! The heads of women, not their breasts, are hollow.

"There are seventy-five or eighty of them in there," he continued, alluding to the letters in the bust. "That would have made seventy-five or eighty checks!"

He decided to count the letters. . . .

Some of them were scented with heliotrope, others with violet, all with some perfume, but none with a check. Some of the letters were rose-tinted, others were blue, two were green — but not of the legal tender shade.

"Eighty-seven ladies," reflected Mr. Turnbull, bitterly, "whom I have moved to tears — cheap, idle tears. . . . collateral which no banker will accept."

The janitor slipped another letter under the door.

"That'll make eighty-eight, and it may have a check," fancied Mr. Turnbull, picking up the mis-sive.

But he recognized the handwriting.

"No," he grumbled, "that's Tim Stone, the prototype of my hero in 'Oak and Palm.' Hello, he's left New York too!"

Mr. Tourne-Boule read:

"My Dear Genius:

"This is to inform you that 'Stone's Subterranean Mushroom Farms' are an accomplished fact, in so far as subscription to stock is concerned. Every share has been taken and paid in full. Furthermore, I have leased for ninety-nine years the caves of Christian County, Kentucky, which is the land of caves. I have established my bed and typewriter in Campbell's Cave — so called from the name of the esquire under whose farm this mighty hole is located. It is the biggest cave in my collection — about the size of Central Park; and I have dumped therein all the choice manure of Christian County. Shiver, when you think of the manure. But I don't mind it. Manure is healthier than . . . 'other people's stairs.' I only wish I could get more of it. You know mushrooms can't be grown except in manure. I have bought all the

manure in this part of the State, and I must now wait to plant my other caves until the horses.... lay. The cow product won't do. Still I am hoping that the output of mushrooms this year from Campbell's Cave will pay a three per cent. dividend on the stock. That's all I want the first year — just enough to keep my stockholders quiet. I've already received twice as many orders as I can fill. The world is clamoring for mushrooms. If I succeed in producing them in anything like the quantities I think I can, then yours truly is not only a rich man, but a public benefactor as well. Think of it: three hundred and fifty varieties of edible mushrooms growing wild in America — more than three times the number indigenous to Europe! This means that there are three hundred and fifty kinds of nutritious foods going to decay throughout nine months of every year in this land of ours, because of the ignorance of the public. In many species of mushrooms there is as much nourishment, proportionately, as in beefsteak. Mushrooms make a fiftieth of the total foodstuff of the French people. The

Catacombs of Paris — old limestone quarries under the city — produce on an average four tons of mushrooms daily, which sell for \$4000—four thousand dollars a day, mind you. Now the caves I've leased here in Kentucky have four times the space of the Paris Catacombs — \$16,000 daily. My caves are in the same soil as the Paris caves — limestone. For some reason mushrooms don't do much in iron or coal soil. The yearly mean temperature is also the same in my caves as in the Catacombs. Indeed all the conditions are the same, and I have three times as many species as my French friends to start with. In what light will future generations consider George Washington, when they reflect on the achievements of Timothy Stone — him who drew from the bowels of the earth wherewith to feed his countrymen cheaply and palatably? 'George,' they will say, 'made us; but 'tis Timothy that hath given us to eat of Mushrooms.' And where will Standard Oil be when I get all my caves to going? — \$16,000 daily from the caves of Christian County alone!

"But it's lonesome wandering around in these

subterranean regions, followed by a swarm of bats. I have practically no one to talk with. When I do hold communion with fellow man, it's generally with the Campbells, who live above me on a mortgaged farm. I take my meals with the Campbells. They are two, father and son. Squire Campbell is drunk every day except Sunday, on which day he atrociously stammers and weeps over his sins. It's strange, but Squire Campbell doesn't stammer when he's drunk. Sometimes his language is as polished and flowery as your own — French quotations and all the rest. Then he'll lapse into the wretched slang of these backwoods. I can't just make him out. The boy too is a phenomenon. He's fourteen years old, and has a yellow dog named 'Pup.' He calls his father 'Pap', and he loves both with a devotion which I've never seen equalled, though neither Pup nor Pap is worth killing.

"But I get so lonesome, I've always been so lonesome, I shall always be so lonesome! Pup, Pap, Pete. . . . Pete is the name of the boy, Pete Campbell.

"I read your book, and it made me still more

lonesome. You made me an attractive character in 'Oak and Palm', that is — attractive to the public. But you painted me, as I am, wretched and lonely, ugly, shunned of women. Why do people like such a character in a book, but not in real life? I wept over myself in 'Oak and Palm.' But.... you did your work well. You'll be celebrated. You're going to achieve greatness, just as I'm going to achieve wealth. You were born to be great, I was born to be rich — as the fortune teller told us that day on the Bowery. You've been trained for greatness. I've been trained for wealth. You were reading Shakespeare while I was chalking up stock quotations. Well.... you'll be great, and I shall be rich, but what then? Is anybody going to love us as Pup loves Pete, as Pete loves Pap, as Pap loves liquor?

"I wish I had a yellow dog!

"My regards to New York. Homage to your genius! But say, old man, don't draw on me for any more material. I admit you painted of me in 'Oak and Palm' a portrait that will never die; and I suppose I ought to thank you, but.... but, some-

how, I object to being scattered broadcast over the land, as the ashes of somebody were scattered over the sea — Who was that, anyway?

“Yours,

“Tim.”

“Well,” commented Mr. Turnbull, as he finished the letter, “that’s a mixture of business and sentiment which is not easy to unravel. I never could unravel Tim Stone. He’s as bad as that drunkard he talks about. When you think he’s this, he’s something else. But I wonder if old Tim’s going to make a fortune with his mushrooms! All these financial magnates are queer sorts of folks — dreamers, every one of them. It takes imagination to form a trust.... an unfaltering trust, and it takes still more to run one. I’ll keep my eye on Tim. We were brought up together — boyhood friends, and so forth. Then Tim is deuced good material. He’s right in thinking that it was his personality which made ‘Oak and Palm’ famous. It’s true that it required a genius to depict him. But then a genius must have material. And such material as Tim Stone is not found every day. He’s pic-

turesque. He has a knack of hitting on picturesque things. That 'Pap, Pup and Pete' condition is picturesque. And that observation of his about people liking in books, a character which they despise in life, is also striking — and it's true. Old Tim himself, for instance, who never had a sweetheart in his life.... I put him in a book, and women weep over him. It's no use denying it; these letters, I receive, are all directed to Tim's personality. Yes, I must keep my eye on Tim. I may get another book out of him some time; then he may make a fortune, who knows?"

Mr. Tourne-Boule was dismissing Tim from his mind, when a flash of inspired thought — of the kind that comes to genius — leaped through his brain:

"Tim wants a yellow dog," he thought. "Why not send him an old maid — or rather an old maid's address! Tim can sign my name, draw the precious old creature out, get at the thoughts of her most inner life, and.... and her letters will be the sequel to 'Oak and Palm.' In 'Oak and Palm' it was the yearning of a lonesome man for woman's

companionship. In the sequel, it will be the yearning of a lonesome woman for man's companionship, and.... and we shall see who goes to Maine on the proceeds of the sequel—I or my friend the publisher; and.... I will shake that wretch of a Countess!”

Thrilled by the thought, Mr. Tourne-Boule seized his pen and dashed off a letter to the friend of his childhood, to Mr. Timothy Stone of Cadiz, Kentucky.

“I'd better send Tim this last one,” decided Mr. Tourne-Boule, referring to Susan's letter, “for it has been quite a while since I received the others; and it doesn't take long to cool.... a woman's ardor even in this temperature.”

CHAPTER VI.

NOW the right way to fall in love, according to psychologists, is to do it quickly. You neither slip, slide, nor vacillate. You know not even what has struck you. You simply fall, fall, fall — away down somewhere to unspeakable depths, clutching wildly at the fluttering ribbons and transparent lace which graze your cheek in the mad descent.

A thud

Thereafter you examine the thing.

“So that’s what hit me, is it? —”

And you investigate — untie the ribbons, remove the lace, light your pipe, and meditate.

“So that is what hit me, well! —”

You meditate. You are all alone. You refill your pipe.

“Well —”

If you grin it is a good sign. That means the

discovery of a little brown-paper package of ordinary friendship, which had been hidden away in the silk and lace.

“Is that all? —”

But you observe that some of your acquaintances have not even drawn friendship in the lottery. You become resigned. You smile bravely.

“No. Marriage is not a failure. Marriage is a surprise, a great surprise, my boy, an overwhelming surprise. You do not know — you do not know anything. Marriage is not a failure, no, not a *failure*....”

But be it known by these presents, that in the case of Mr. Timothy Stone, the process was reversed. Mr. Stone went from friendship to love. He began writing to Susan because he had nothing else to do. After the mushroom spawn had been planted, time hung heavily on Mr. Stone's hands. Pup was a dumb animal, Pap intoxicated, Pete taciturn. Mr. Stone scribbled any and all sorts of fancies — the first that came to his mind — signed Turnbull's French name, stuffed the frequently blotted sheets into an envelope, and sent them on to

New York, in the care of a certain dealer in Produce, who forwarded the same to Mrs. McPheeters, who in turn mailed the documents to Susan.

Mr. Stone was obliged to have his letters mailed at New York. Susan could see in any newspaper that Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule was spending the summer at New York, busy with a forthcoming book.

Mr. Stone wrote of novels and plays — as becoming a Tourne-Boule — also of music and operas, painting and etching. He discoursed further on agriculture, horses and whiskey, sociology, tariff reform, banking, and the stock exchange.

“I’m writing to myself,” he explained to Pete. “You never know what your views are until you write them down.”

“Sure!” replied Pete.

Then Susan’s answers began to come, sent in the same roundabout way — first to Mrs. McPheeters, from Mrs. McPheeters to the dealer in Produce, and thence to Mr. Stone.

Letters addressed by Susan to anyone save Mrs. McPheeters would have at once excited the sus-

picion of Doctor Alvin, and brought the correspondence to an end. Mrs. McPheeters was Susan's old governess.

"She simply echoes my views," was Mr. Stone's comment on Susan's first letters. "That's the way with women, they either agree or disagree with you in every thing."

But Susan was feeling her way. She was studying the specimen. As soon as she had caught the drift of Mr. Stone's philosophy, Susan began an analysis, recording her observations as she went.

"You are a compassionate cynic," she informed Mr. Stone. "You jeer at what you pity, and you pity what you jeer — yourself included. You feel quite sorry for yourself."

Mr. Stone was obliged to admit that Susan's observation was accurate.

"Pete," he observed, "there's nothing, scientifically speaking, to prevent a woman thinking — every now and then."

Susan proceeded to give evidence of much thought. She too seemed interested in putting her

thoughts on paper. Apparently Susan was writing to herself. She used the wondrous language of heart throbs — the kind that flits from style to style, then up and away to where only wings may follow, to that mystic realm of four dimensions where science, art, and music meet, marry, mingle into one, and show us God.

“Are you with me, dear?” Susan asked of Mr. Stone. “Are you there? Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear?”

Mr. Stone was with her. Mr. Stone was there. He saw what Susan saw, and he heard what she heard. His lonesomeness had taught him to hear hushed notes. Solitude had bestowed the godlike gift of inner sight. But it was new, quite new, to feel at his side a woman, who not only walked with him in the mystic realm, but who frequently led the way, and caught from the Universe a murmur, which his soul had not recorded. It was new, and it was strange — and it was sweet.

Mr. Stone laid down his cynicism, as he might have cast aside a cloak. Mr. Stone bared his heart. To Susan’s volume of the “Oak and Palm” he

added chapter after chapter, which Turnbull had never dreamed.

She was his sister, the twin sister of his soul. And they roamed through the fields of their mystic realm, pointing out flowers which grew for them alone — not a glance at the mountains, not a thought of the sea.

“I’m glad I do not know you,” he wrote. “I’m glad you do not know me. Let us remain unknown, that our friendship may continue. Somewhere else, somehow, hereafter, you will seek me out, and I shall find you, fair as I dream you . . . and perhaps I shall be fair — in the Hereafter.”

“But, dear,” she replied, “you *are* ‘fair’. And you shall know me when father comes back.”

Mr. Stone prayed for earthquakes and shipwrecks that should detain his ‘sister’s’ father.

Susan was looking at Turnbull’s portrait in “Oak and Palm,” and thinking it was he. Mr. Stone knew full well that he was not fair to look upon. He dreaded lest he lose his sister through his looks.

“That picture flatters me,” he wrote to Susan.

“Are you lame in anyway?” she asked.

"No, but I'm ugly."

"Are you really small?"

"No, I'm six feet and weigh two hundred. But I'm ugly."

"You're as handsome as Adonis. Isn't your hair and beard brown?"

"No, I told you I was ugly. I haven't any beard — I had it cut off after that deceptive picture was taken. And my hair is thin and.... red! I told you I was ugly."

"Why do you tease me, naughty boy?" Susan wrote back.

And she complained of her brother, because he had never asked for her photograph.

"I was afraid you were pretty," he replied. "Don't be pretty, Susan! If you're pretty, don't send me your picture. Friendship between the sexes is impossible if the woman be pretty. Then don't be young: young women are unconsciously provoking. And be poor as Griselda: a rich woman doesn't need friendship."

Explained Mr. Stone to himself:

"If I lose my sister, if I lose the only woman that

ever took me by the hand and let me walk and talk with her, I shall be disconsolate."

"Sure!" replied Pete, who was listening.

But Susan did not comprehend. She lacked Pete's perspicacity.

"He doesn't want me to be pretty," Susan mused. "Then he says I ought not to be young. And he is looking for somebody who is as poor as Griselda...."

Susan moped.

"Who was *Griselda*?" she asked of herself.

Susan did not know.

"Who was *Griselda*?" she asked of Lucile.

Lucile did not know.

But Captain Malepeste knew. He explained that Griselda had been wretchedly poor. Her lover had been obliged to bestow a frock at their first meeting. Captain Malepeste referred Susan to Boccaccio.

Susan was nonplussed. She spent two days in bewilderment. Then she decided to take Lucile into her confidence.

Miss Wentmore had been longing and praying

for this confession on the part of Susan. Since the bare announcement of her intention to write to Mr. Tourne-Boule, Susan had not told Lucile a word. But *Jacques* was the French for "James." *James* suggested "Jim." And the state of Miss Wentmore's mind may be readily fancied:

Was Jim writing to Susan!

Did Jim know that Susan's father had five million dollars!

Was.... did.... would?

Would.... did.... was?

Was's had been would'ing, and did's had been doing frightfully in Lucile's poor little head ever since Susan's announcement of her intention to write to Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule of New York.

So when Susan said, with affected carelessness:

"You know, Lucile, I wrote to.... to that man," Miss Wentmore responded, with undisguised anxiety:

"Yes, and what'd he say?"

Susan forgot to be indifferent. She plunged immediately into the midst of things, and cried:

"Why, he wants me to be ugly and poor and old!"

"Poor!" exclaimed Lucile.

"Poor too," replied Susan. "'Poor as Griselda' the . . . the girl who didn't have a frock. That is what he says."

"Well, that ain't Jim," averred Lucile.

"Jim . . . what Jim?" asked Susan.

Lucile had blundered. She hastened to explain:

"My Jim . . . you know, my Jim. He wouldn't marry me, because I *was* poor. You ought to be thankful, Susan, that you've found a man in New York, who isn't looking for a fortune. But—" Miss Wentmore hesitated. "But, Susan, whom did you write to?"

"Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule."

"The author of the book I lent you?"

"Yes. The author of 'Oak and Palm'."

"And he says he's looking for a *poor* woman?"

"I'll show you his letter . . . He says he doesn't want my photograph unless I'm ugly and old and poor —"

As Susan disappeared in search of the letter, Lu-

cile soliloquized: "What a hypocrite! He's heard about her money, and he's trying to make her believe —"

Susan returned with the letter.

"It's written on a typewriter," she explained, apologetically, to Lucile.

"That isn't nice," declared Lucile, taking the letter.

She asked:

"But where is the signature?"

"Those initials down there in the corner.... don't you see them?"

"Yes, but they're not...."

Lucile gasped to catch the hope. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule despised typewriters, she knew full well. And his initials, when he signed them, were exquisitely interwoven into a monogram, as compared with which Mr. Stone's clumsy characters were a scrawl.

"Yes, but they're not...."

"Nice, either," concluded Susan.

"No, they are not nice," assented Lucile, wondering if she should out and tell Susan all she knew.

"But I love him, and he loves me," remarked Susan, in a cold, scientific way.

This was decidedly too much for Miss Wentmore's nerves. She sank breathless into a nearby chair. But she sank, holding the letter. After she had swooned a little, and gasped several times, she read the document.

"That's the same sort of tommyrot he put into 'Oak and Palm'," finally observed Miss Wentmore, alluding to the letter. "'Sister of my soul'.... *pâté de foie gras!*"

"But.... but, Lucile," faltered Susan, "I thought you believed in sentiment and.... and sweethearts! You said I ought to have a.... a...."

"A sweetheart," prompted Miss Wentmore.

"Yes. And now you call it.... *pâté de foie gras.*" What do you mean? Isn't that a.... a sweetheart?"

Susan pointed to the letter.

"Oh, this is a *sweet heart* all right," replied Miss Wentmore, holding up the type-written letter, disdainfully. "It's so sweet, it's sticky.... *whew!*"

Put up in a box, sold by the pound, for sale by all grocers — ”

Susan turned pale. Lucile's mockery cut her to the quick. Though bleeding, she replied, undaunted :

“ I have been writing the same kind of . . . of stuff to him ; and I felt every word I wrote.”

“ But, child,” broke forth Lucile, “ why didn't you employ a calico-clerk to grind out letters on a typewriter ? That's what he has done. Don't you know that those scratches are not his signature ? ”

“ He said that he had hurt his right hand . . . and I believe him,” explained Susan. “ He was afraid I could not read what he wrote with his left hand. That is why he uses a typewriter.”

Lucile had been hoping — almost believing — that the writer of the letters was not Turnbull. Still the mere thought of the possibility of such a thing had made her angry. When Susan explained away all doubt as to the apparent authorship of the letters, Lucile flew into a rage.

“ It's your money he's after ! ” she cried. “ It's your money. I know him. He's a scoundrel. It's

your father's five millions. He doesn't care a snap of his fingers for you...."

Lucile snapped two bluish fingers in Susan's face.

Susan, however, had been brought up like a man — in Kentucky, where snapping your finger in a neighbor's face is equivalent to snapping your gun. Consequently Ruth's back humped somewhat, Milo's neck drooped ominously low, then Hebe's hands clutched.... and Lucile perceived between her gasps that the breath was being shaken out of her body. The Mother of the Gracchi was a redoubtable matron, being the daughter of Scipio.

"Su.... Su.... Susan!" screamed Lucile.

Susan had been taught that it was dangerous to let up while an antagonist possessed the power of speech. She continued to winnow Lucile thoroughly. Down came Lucile's hair, off went her slippers, this way her brooch, that way her hair-pins; up, what should have stayed down; down, what should have remained up. Finally, when the tangled mass grew limp and silent, Susan, true to the psychology of her passionate nature, suddenly became filled with remorse. She caught up to her

bosom what remained of Lucile, hugged her, kissed her, called her endearing names; then she trotted about the room with Lucile in her arms, like a magnificent tigress carrying a wounded cub....

Not a word, not a growl; but great black eyes flashing through yellow hair; muscles that stood out, then melted away mysteriously; nostrils that quivered, lips that set — “Animalism!” you cry. So be it, and let animalism be mine!

And she dressed Lucile. Down on her knees, before the chair, she put Lucile’s slippers on. She patted her feet. She kissed the hair which she arranged. She bit the neck which a breastpin re-adorned. She bit.... and she kissed. “Animalism!” No, womanhood. A bite, then a kiss.... sacro-sanct ritual of the daughters of Eve.

With this they reasoned together — after the shaking and the biting and the kisses, after Susan had begged and obtained forgiveness, after Lucile had declared her eternal love for Susan, and expressed her regret at not being a man, that she might marry her — they reasoned together, Susan maintaining that her correspondent knew nothing of her

father's wealth, Lucile insisting that he had obtained the information in some peculiar way.

"You know, darling," explained Lucile, "those people in New York are on a continual look-out for fortunes. They scent money like the giant in the fairy story; only, I believe, it was the blood of an Englishman there."

Susan objected.

Lucile continued:

"I can prove it to you, dear, if you will let me...."

Susan assented.

Lucile proposed:

"Send him my photograph, and make out it's yours."

Susan puzzled.

Lucile explained:

"He said he wanted you to be old and ugly and poor...."

"Lucile!"

Lucile wept.

"Lucile, you said you had forgiven me, and you have not. You're trying to make me feel bad."

"No, I'm in earnest. You know that horrid photograph Captain Malepeste took of me, the other day, on Daredevil? I look forty years old — and you know, Susan, I *am* twenty-eight. I told you I was twenty-four, but I'm twenty-eight all told. Promise me on your honor that you won't tell. . . . Captain Malepeste. Well, now, send him that picture, and just wait and see what he says! Daredevil had been wallowing in the mud. He had cockleburs in his tail. He doesn't suggest five millions in that photograph, any more than I do. We're ugly and old and poor. Send that photograph to Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule. You say he'll keep on loving you, no matter what you are. — If he does, all right. Later on, you'll disclose your identity. . . . and live happily ever afterward."

"But, Lucile," objected Susan, "suppose he were to fall in love with your portrait, what then?"

Lucile blushed for just a second. Then smiling sadly, she led Susan to a mirror.

"Which is the prettier of us two?" she asked.

"Why, I'm the bigger, but you're the prettier, Lucile."

Lucile looked at Susan in astonishment, and then observed:

"And I honestly believe you mean what you say."

"I do."

"Susan, you're an infant.... Why, a man wouldn't even look my way, if you were within ten miles of me. I'm ugly, you hear me? And I'm.... I'm old, I'm just thirty, that's the gospel truth. And I haven't a nickel in the world. You send me on to his lordship, and...."

"But Lucile, maybe he's looking for somebody who's just thirty — I'm only twenty-two."

"Susan, I defy your muscles again, and solemnly assert that you're a near relative of that melancholy, yodling donkey-jack. Send him my photograph, and you can send on your own in a week, if you like.... Isn't that the way great dames used to do in old legends? — They always sent a maid to pave the way for them — a sweet little maid, whom the knight at first took for his lady.... And I *am* sweet, ain't I, Susan, even if I am old and ugly and poor?"

The picture of Miss Wentmore riding Daredevil, was despatched to the Knight that afternoon. Susan, however, true to her training in the arts and sciences, and also true to that queer instinct which, even if it were possible, would prevent any of us willfully exchanging our identity for that of another, had taken down her own measurements by dint of much labor, and she had written out these measurements very plainly indeed—on the back of the photograph of Lucile.

Ah me! — in the accents of Greek Tragedy.

CHAPTER VII.

IF women were only acquainted with the sweet humility of the homely man, they would go out into the byways and gather him up: the ugly man has to be gathered; he shuns the highway; he is lonely. Peeping through the hedge, he sees you, Madam, gallivanting with his handsome brother; and he loves you. — Oh, how he loves you! He would give ten years of his life to look for ten seconds, real close, into your fathomless eyes. But he dares not: he is ugly. Unspeakable is the martyrdom which exists in the hearts of ugly men. Women do not comprehend, there being no ugly women.

Nor will any woman understand the capers which Mr. Stone cut on receiving the photograph. It was the first time in his life that a woman had given him her photograph. Mr. Timothy Stone danced for joy in his sombre cave; he kissed the photograph; he apostrophized it thus:

"I'll be damned.... I'll be damned.... I'll be damned!"

The ugly man's voice rose an octave every time he pronounced the ugly word, with the result that his third damnation was in reality a superb shout of triumph.

No self-respecting woman will understand the pathos of these three damns. And it's a pity. But Pup, who arrived at the first one, and Pete at the second, understood the 'dees perfectly.

"That's what you call a woman!" explained Mr. Stone, proudly.

"Sure," replied Pete.

"Pup, bark for Madam!" ordered Mr. Stone.

Pup barked.

"Now, gentlemen, the funny thing," declared Mr. Stone, "is that this high-minded holy creature I'm holding here in my two hands, is *my* girl. She's the collateral of T. Stone, Esquire."

"Sure."

"Did you ever have a girl, Pete?"

Pete was not sure.

"You ought to get one, my boy. They're a big lot of comfort."

Pete was sure.

He observed:

"Golly, that ther's a bully hoss she's on!"

"Sure," assented Mr. Stone. "Bully horse, bully woman."

"But they's 'kerculburs' sure as all outdoors!" announced Pete.

"Cockleburs!" exclaimed Mr. Stone. "Do you mean to insinuate that there are cockleburs on the Madam?"

"Don' know 'bout the gal; but they's kerculburs on the hoss. Look ther' at his tail!.... Them's kerculburs. Look ther' at his mane! Them's kerculburs. That ther' hoss ain't been curried!"

The young Kentuckian made his last statement in an awful whisper, as if he were accusing somebody of being a "revenue-collector."

Mr. Stone was not a Kentuckian. He remonstrated:

"What have I to do with the cockleburs in the tail of the steed of my lady! Why, cockleburs stick

to everything! Look in Pup's tail, and you'll find cockleburs. Look at cows' tails, they're one mass of cockleburs — sheep tails, mule tails, any sort of tail. If you had a tail, my boy, I bet a dollar 'twould be full of cockleburs. Why, man, this world of ours is full of cockleburs — cockleburs and cads."

"I know," protested Pete, weakly, "but it's a doggone shame for a hoss like that ther' to have kerculburs in his tail."

"In the first place," observed Mr. Stone, who had been carefully studying the photograph, "I doubt very much if they *are* cockleburs. What you see in there is the effect of photography. Do you understand the principles of photography, Pete?"

Pete was not sure.

Mr. Stone explained:

"Things lump up sometimes in photography. What looks to you in there like cockleburs are in reality only lumps. . . . photographic lumps."

"They look awful like kerculburs to me," insisted Pete.

"For instance," continued Mr. Stone. "How tall would you take this lady to be?"

Pete looked at the picture, cocking his head to one side; then he announced:

"Hoss — fifteen hands. I'd say she's 'tween five foot one an' five foot two.... She's a little bit 'a critter."

Mr. Stone grunted disdainfully. He observed:

"That's what you know about the principles of photography! Why, Pete, that lady is sixty-six inches tall!"

"I never hered tell of folks as was *inches*," protested Pete.

"That's because you're not conversant with the language of art. I'll reduce it to feet.... That lady is five foot six."

"I don't believe it," asserted Pete.

"But I tell you she is!"

"How do you know?" inquired Pete.

"Because she says she is. She's put down her measurement on the back of this photograph.... Here's her height, weight, width around the shoulder, waist, everything. My girl's an artist,

Pete. She's exactly eight heads tall. That's what they say in art — They measure you by your head, not by feet."

"That ther' may be," assented Pete. "But I'll bet Pup agin a rattle-snake that ther' pusson on that hoss ain't five foot six! I'm five foot two, myself, an' I'd look a heap sight bigger an' she do on that ther' hoss. You fix up ther' on the wall how tall you say she is, an' jus' let me stan' back once an' look at 'er...."

Mr. Stone measured off five feet six inches on the wall of the cave.

"That's what she is," he explained, holding his hand at the mark.

He added, immediately:

"Come here and hold the place, and let me have a look at her...."

Pete obeyed.

"That's a fine woman!" commented Mr. Stone.
"Her head will come to.... my heart."

He exclaimed, as Pete was lowering his hand:

"But, man, don't lose the place! I'm not through looking yet.... Eight heads — that would

make her head eight inches and a fraction. Wait a minute; I'll fix her head.... "

Tape in hand, Mr. Stone was measuring various objects of his cave.

"Here you are! Hold this tin bucket up there.... That's her head—little over eight inches."

Pete held the tin bucket at the mark.

"Fine woman!" commented Mr. Stone. "But wait a minute, man! I'm not through."

Mr. Stone was searching anew, measuring as he went.

"Here you are exactly," he at length cried, "forty inches around the breast—This basket is exactly forty inches. Pete, hold that basket up there, and be careful. That's the top floor—head's the cupola. Fine woman.... very fine woman! Pete, don't take any liberties with that basket. Wait a minute; I'm not through yet.... "

Mr. Stone was searching again. He exclaimed:

"Just the thing, bless her snow-white, dazzling soul!"

Mr. Stone produced a plank.

"That's her waist — twenty-five inches. Pete, hold that plank up there. . . ."

"I ain't got but two hands," declared Pete.

"Hold the plank with your elbows, man. That's where she ties her apron — cute little lace aprons."

As Pete obeyed, Mr. Stone remarked:

"Awfully fine woman."

Pete sighed.

Mr. Stone consulted the measurements on the back of the photograph, and began to search again:

"Forty-one inches. . . . forty-one inches," he murmured, as he sought.

"You goin' to put on any mo' floors?" humbly questioned Pete.

"Why, man, you don't suppose I'm going to leave my girl up there in the air like that, do you?"

"Then let's lay her down on the groun'," prayed Pete.

Mr. Stone thought a moment, then he assented:

"All right. Let's lay her down — gently. Put her head here — carefully. That's a good place. Then the basket. . . . Now the plank. . . . And,

Pete, you keep Pup away: I don't want him to — to sniff around my girl."

Pete held Pup back. Mr. Stone took up his search, murmuring as before:

"Forty-one inches. . . . forty-one inches. . . ."

"What you lookin' for now?" inquired Pete.

"Forty-one inches," replied Mr. Stone.

Pete reflected a moment, gazing meanwhile at the sections of Mr. Stone's collateral. Then he reasoned in the form of a question:

"You lookin' for the end of her back?"

"Course, man," growled Mr. Stone, as he sought.

"How 'bout that bushel?" questioned Pete.

"Just about it," agreed Mr. Stone, after he had taken the dimensions of the bushel measure.

And while he added the 'ground floor', he murmured:

"Deuced fine woman!"

"Now you's got to find her legs," explained Pete, who was becoming interested.

"You hold Pup," commanded Mr. Stone.

"How 'bout them drain pipe over ther'?" affably inquired Pete.

"I'm doing this job, you 'tend to Pup," repeated Mr. Stone, roughly.

But he added the yellow drain pipe, as Pete had suggested, using two sizes.

Inwardly encouraged, Pete further proposed:

"Saw off them scantlins the right length, an' you'll have arms."

Mr. Stone sawed in silence, like a wise statesman.

"An' you mean to say," continued Pete, incredulously, when the scantling had been added, "You mean to say that ther' pusson on the hoss is big as all that?"

Mr. Stone did not reply. He was busy staking into place, for time and eternity, the sections of his strange statue. At length he observed:

"Pete, there are moments in every man's life when he wants to be by himself. Take Pup out into the field, and see if you can't scare up a rabbit. . . . I'll give you a dollar if you catch him."

Pete retired, explaining to Pup — but loud enough for Mr. Stone to hear:

"If she is, then that ther' hoss she's on is bigger'n a elephant!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BUT it is woeful — this thing of being by yourself, this putting out your light, and retiring with darkness, tossing in darkness, choking on darkness, then awaking.... Dark, still dark. Oh solitude! Oh narrow grave! How joyful, it seems to me, our lonely skeletons would be, if they could moulder in company. Bury me not alone. I have already served my sentence of solitude. Put heathenish things to lie with me — some book-girded dream of mine, some plaything. I cannot reach the flowers which you strew six feet above — inhuman mockery!

And it is still more woeful — this thing of wanting to be by yourself. At such times you are wounded, and the impulse you feel is that of a wounded wild animal who creeps off to die. Animals abhor death and their mate who is dying — so do men.

Creep away, steal away, be by yourself. You are wounded when you want to be alone.

Mr. Timothy Stone was wounded. That was why he wished to be by himself. A thought had wounded Mr. Stone—one of these dart-like thoughts which are ever on the alert for the tender hearts of ugly men. A mental exclamation had announced the thought:

“What a fool I am!”

Men who are convinced of their ugliness are certain they are fools. Handsome men are equally sure of their own genius. This rule applies not to women—nor does any other rule.

“What a damn fool I am,” exclaimed Mr. Stone, aloud, when Pete and Pup had left him.

The dart-like thought jabbed Mr. Stone in each of his heart’s auricles and ventricles.

“Jab! Jab!” for the auricles.

“Jab! Jab!” for the ventricles.

“Busted!” commented Mr. Stone.

But he spoke commercially: he was gazing at the curious statue of Susan before him.

“I haven’t any collateral, and I haven’t ever had

any," he explained. "She belongs to Turnbull from the basket clear down to the last section of pipe. And here I've been going into a duckfit over her! What a damn fool I am."

Mr. Stone recalled the portrait of Turnbull, as depicted on the fly-leaf of "Oak and Palm"—a Greek nose, a Roman forehead, a French beard, and Spanish eyes; girlish lips, womanish waving hair, and ears which only an aristocrat might have—thin ears, small ears, clinging and oblong, lobed to perfection, and nestling like coral brooches in the fluff of his hair....

Mr. Stone's hair, not his ears, reflected the tint of coral!

Mr. Stone bemoaned destiny.

That some be rich, and others poor, he would grant. — Man by his own efforts might lay up for himself and his love treasures on Earth. That some have talent, and others not, he would also admit.— Talent was not a prerequisite of happiness. But that he be homely, and another fair, was a crime on the part of Destiny.

"I'd like to know how I'm going to get any

woman to love me, so long as the likes of Turnbull are hanging around," demanded Mr. Stone of Destiny.

Destiny did not immediately reply, being slow of speech. But Destiny made a memorandum of the question.

Mr. Stone continued:

"You see, she's in love with me because she thinks Turnbull's head is on my shoulders. If you had given me Turnbull's face, I'd have been all right. I would have gone up to her in broad daylight, tapped her on the shoulder, and said: 'Hello, Susan! Here I am.' She'd have said: 'Yes, that's you. I know you by your photograph. You're all right.' Then I'd have said: 'Susan, let's get married.' And she'd have said: 'I don't care if we do.'

"That's all I would have had to do, to be the happiest man in Kentucky," explained Mr. Stone, to Destiny, "if you had only seen fit to put a head *à la Tourne-Boule* on my shoulders. As it is, it's Pete, Pap, Pup, and the mushrooms; Pete, Pap, Pup, and Timothy.... Take a drink, bite off a

chaw, all the girls in Kingdom Come. Turnbull's head on my shoulders....

"But, Balm of Gilead!" cried Mr. Stone, leaping to his feet, as Destiny's first suggestion came, "Susan thinks Turnbull is six feet tall and weighs two hundred; and she said she was mighty glad of it, because she liked strong men; and Tourne-Boule ain't, 'praise God', no, he ain't, 'from whom', six feet! 'all blessings flow!'"

And the Balm of Gilead flowed into the mangled soul of Mr. Timothy Stone....

If Susan was deceived as to Mr. Stone's face, she was also grievously mistaken as to Mr. Turnbull's height and weight. The measurements Mr. Stone had sent Susan, at her request, were his own, not those of Mr. Turnbull. Mr. Turnbull was quite small, and he was thin. His chest measurement was at least eight inches less than that of Mr. Stone. Mr. Tourne-Boule, like most aristocrats, had kept the head of his ancestors. His body, however, had sadly degenerated. It takes an entire genealogy to destroy a face, once that it has become chiselled. But a body may be blighted in one generation.

"Why, I doubt if Turnbull is as tall as Susan," joyfully reflected Mr. Stone. "Susan is five foot six. She is broad and thick in proportion. And a woman always appears taller and thicker — especially thicker — than she really is."

Mr. Stone probed his joy:

"Turnbull will be outclassed!" he exclaimed. "He will look like a dwarf, walking beside her. That little man won't do for Susan!"

That night in his cave, as he went to sleep, Mr. Stone summed up the situation:

"Susan's got Jim's head on my shoulders. She's got my soul depicted with Jim's literary style, in 'Oak and Palm' — my heart and Jim's wit...."

Going to sleep with the thought imbedded in his mind, Mr. Stone dreamed that Susan had married both of them: him, for his chest; Jim, for his face; him, for his soul; Jim, for his style; him, for his heart; Jim, for his wit.

He had just opened his eyes the next morning, furious at Susan's plural marriage, when Pete and Pup came rushing into the cave. Pup was barking savagely. Pete was out of breath.

"What in the deuce is the matter with you?" called out Mr. Stone, still angrily meditating on Susan's mad doings in his dreams.

"I done told you she wa'n't big as what you said she was," announced Pete, gasping for breath.

"That who wasn't?" questioned Mr. Stone, in bed, and propped on his elbow.

"An' I done told you them ther' was kercul-burs!"

"That what was?"

"You's got to do some more sawin' on them scantlins. You's got to take in your pipe. An' you'd better put a peck where you's got that ther' bushel...."

Pete was looking disdainfully at the prostrate statue.

"Pete," observed Mr. Stone, kindly, "you've gone crazy. Throw the spade at Pup, and make him stop barking at me."

"But I's done seed her on the horse," declared Pete. Pap seed her. Pup barked at her, and there was a man with her."

"Seen whom?"

"That ther' gal we was measurin' off yesterday — the gal in the picter — this here gal. . . ."

Pete pointed to the statue.

"You say there was a man with her?" inquired Mr. Stone, already jealous, though inwardly he accused Pete of seeing visions.

"Yes. He was 'bout as old as Pap; an' he was short an' right fat."

"That was her father," explained Mr. Stone, optimistically.

But as sleep left him, he suddenly realized the significance of what the boy was saying.

"Pete," he announced, "you must stop measuring ladies; it's not good for boys — nor men either. I slept awfully. . . ."

"But I done seed her, Pap seed her, an' I gived her a gourd of water at the spring," declared Pete, in worse English, but more positive than ever.

"You gave her a gourd of water?"

"Two of 'em," corrected Pete; "an' she drunk 'em both."

"Visions do not drink," admitted Mr. Stone.

"An' she ain't near as big as you make her out," continued Pete.

He added:

"An' them ther's kerculburs on that hoss."

Further:

"An' the man, he done spoke Frinch."

"Spoke French! How do you know that?" exclaimed Mr. Stone, all his senses reeling, as he remembered that Susan had often alluded in her letters to a Frenchman, who was a member of her family.

"'Cause Pap said so. Pap said the man was gittin' off some Frinch."

"What does Pap know about French?" asked Mr. Stone, cynically.

"Oh, Pap, he knows Frinch all right. Pap knows lots. Some day when you git him to talkin', Pap'll tell you what he knows."

Mr. Stone was dressing furiously.

"But she's done gone now," said Pete, noting Mr. Stone's haste.

"Is Pap very drunk?" asked Mr. Stone, still hurrying.

"He's right smart drunk," admitted Pete, "but he's stiddy enough to bark squirrels. That's what we was doin' ther' at the spring when them folks rode up."

"Well, come on," commanded Mr. Stone, seizing his hat.

They found Pap comfortably seated at the spring, a flask of powder on one side, a flask of whiskey on the other, a long muzzle-loading rifle across his arm, and three "barked" squirrels on the ground before him.

Pap corroborated his son's statement. They had been at the spring since day break, "barking" squirrels. About half past six o'clock, a lady and gentleman, riding horseback, had come up and asked for water.

"And it's the lady who sat for this photograph," declared Squire Campbell, examining the picture which Mr. Stone presented.

"Pete says the gentleman spoke French," advanced Mr. Stone, diplomatically.

"He did," replied Squire Campbell. "His accent was perfect."

"So.... So, Squire, you know French," stammered Mr. Stone, looking in amazement at the unkempt drunkard before him.

Reaching out, Squire Campbell chose the flask that contained whiskey, and holding it aloft, he solemnly proposed:

*"Enfants de la folie, buvons!
Sur les maux de la vie, glissons."*

Mr. Stone came to the conclusion that he was still in bed, dreaming. Wearily he sat himself down on a stone, not far from Squire Campbell.

Pete was delighted. He felt proud of Pap. Pap had proved that he "knew lots." Wishing to show off other accomplishments of his father, Pete said:

"An', Pap, tell Mr. Stone 'bout that ther' fellow who lived in a barrel, an' told the other fellow to git out of his sun...."

Pete danced about — It was a great story, to his thinking.

Mr. Stone was mystified. He questioned:

"The same fellow who was with the lady this morning?"

"Naw," replied Pete, disdainfully, "we's talkin'

'bout the fellow what broke his dipper when he seed a kid drinkin' in his hand!"

"What's he got to do with the lady?" asked Mr. Stone.

"Nothin' 't all. We's done stop talkin' 'bout the lady," explained Pete. "We's talkin' 'bout the fellow what lived in a barrel, an' broke his dipper, and lit his lantern in the day time.... Tell him, Pap!"

Squire Campbell was smiling sadly. He observed:

"My son, the story of Diogenes is known to Mr. Stone...."

"'Diogenes', that's his name!" cried Pete, clapping his hands.

He asked Mr. Stone:

"Did you ever hear 'bout that ther' fellow?"

Mr. Stone collapsed.

Said Pap:

"I'm sleepy. Goodnight, children. Goodnight, Sarepta."

And swallowing all the whiskey that remained in the flask, Squire Campbell stretched himself on

the ground, in the bright morning sunlight. He forthwith went to sleep.

“Sarepta was my mammy,” explained Pete.

CHAPTER IX.

“**P**AP has delirium tremens, Pete has gone crazy, Pup is trying to perpetrate a joke, and I’m a fool,” reasoned Mr. Stone, as the sun came up out of the East, and tinged with gold the top of the tall scaly-barked hickory tree.

This was the third morning that Mr. Stone had gotten up before daybreak, gone to the spring, and waited there until ten o’clock — ostensibly for the purpose of barking squirrels.

“I’m a fool, I . . . ”

But what was that!

Mr. Stone began to tremble as his ear caught the sound of horses’ hoofs. Somebody was coming, galloping . . .

“Patter pat! Patter pat!”

Mr. Stone’s heart began to beat in unison with the horses’ hoofs:

“Patter pat! Patter pat! Patter pat!”

When the coal-black horse shot into view, bearing a woman dressed in white, a woman with yellow hair, and who kept her saddle with the skill of a circus rider, Mr. Stone's heart rose and palpitated, fluttered....

But, sunshine of Diogenes, what 'lumps'!.... What soul-stirring, heart-rending, hemispherical 'lumps', which her photograph had not disclosed, and which were not cockleburs! Things sometimes lumped in photography: 'twas a defect of the lens. But the monticules which Nature moulded on the mystic metopes of Aphrodite's frieze....

Pete was a liar and a fool. She sat every inch of her five foot six....

When Susan drew up within a few feet of him, Mr. Stone's heart stopped beating for the fraction of a second. When she asked him for a gourd of water, he could neither move hand nor foot.

But in spite of his perturbation, Mr. Stone observed that Susan's escort was not the man whom Pete had described as "short and right fat." This

man was tall, very tall, gaunt; and something in his gloomy countenance chilled Mr. Stone's heart.

"My good man," said the gloomy giant to Mr. Stone, repeating Susan's request, "would you be so kind as to give us a gourd of water?"

Mr. Stone considered that the giant's mournful voice was as disagreeable as his looks. Mr. Stone's heart, which but a second before had been beating to thoughts of love, began to pulsate with throbs of hatred. He hated that tall spectre of a man, he knew not why. He asked himself seriously if he should not take deliberate aim, and shoot him dead before it was too late.

"What's the matter with the poor man?" questioned Susan of Doctor Alvin. "I also asked him to give me a drink of water, and he did not move."

"Drunk!" replied Doctor Alvin. "Whiskey is the curse of the State."

The giant was in the act of getting down from his horse, when Mr. Stone suddenly became imbued with the power of movement.

Mr. Stone pulled his hat down over his eyes, seized the gourd, wrathfully plunged it into the

spring, and rushed toward Icarus so fiercely, that the sagacious animal swerved, then plunged to the other side of the road.

Susan laughed.

"Icarus!" she cried.

"That's the way a horse acts before a bear," observed Doctor Alvin.

Meanwhile Mr. Timothy Stone, "Good man," and "Bear," stood in the middle of the road, with his hat over his eyes, holding Pap's rifle in one hand, and with the other extending a gourd of cool spring water toward empty space.

"Stand there, please," said Susan, to the bear. "I'll make Icarus come to you."

Without a word, she slipped from the saddle to the back of her horse. Raising the flap of the saddle, Susan tightened the two girths, each one a hole. Then she carefully examined the stirrup. After which she leaped, rather than slipped, into the saddle. She raised her riding habit until a foot was disclosed — and a cunningly carved socle of Aphrodite's shrine. She thrust the diminutive foot into the stirrup; and as the riding habit descended like

a curtain on the apotheosis in a play, Mr. Stone felt that same diminutive foot tramping, treading, trampling, with the weight of a mastodon, on his heart.

"Icarus," she said grimly, reining in the frightened animal, and tapping him gently with the cowhide she carried.

But Icarus did not wish to go near Mr. Stone, the bear. Icarus wheeled again, snorting with fear, shiny and wet as a leviathan.

Down came the cowhide, stinging this time, and the great black horse reared until it was almost upright, bounded, but wheeled about Mr. Stone, as it might have done in a circus ring, refusing, however, to draw any nearer.

Doctor Alvin sat watching the performance in silence. Mr. Stone forgot everything in his admiration of Susan's horsemanship. Mr. Stone turned as Icarus turned, holding out the gourd to Susan. He was holding out his heart — his trampled heart. But he did not say a word. Only the snorting of Icarus, and the pounding of his iron-shod feet, broke the forest stillness.

Up reared the horse again, this time immediately above Mr. Stone. Mr. Stone saw the animal's flashing eyes glaring at him overhead. He almost felt the breath from the red nostrils. He saw the nails in the pointed up-lifted hoofs. . . . But back of all these, Mr. Stone saw Susan's night-like eyes, which were lighted up with a wild expression of fear for Mr. Stone's life — and Mr. Stone decided that it was a good time to die: Susan would regret his death.

Mr. Timothy Stone, therefore, smiled as blandly as a child — He smiled one of those smiles which, in the case of the early Christian martyrs, wrought miracles in Roman arenas. This smile saved his life. Icarus saw the smile, and knew that Mr. Stone was not a bear. Icarus, accordingly, swerved by a hair breadth as he descended — grazed, but did not strike the martyr, came to the ground with a mighty thud, then (Roman martyrs, listen!) Icarus neighed joyfully, and rubbed his nose against Mr. Stone's sleeve.

Mr. Stone continued to smile seraphically. Supporting his rifle on his arm, he reached up and re-

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moving his hat — disclosing red hair. Then bowing low, he handed to Susan the humble gourd:

“Madam, it is my heart,” he said.

Susan blushed. It was the first time a man had said such a thing to her. Susan’s blushing face, with its aureole of blond hair, suggested poppies and wheat, red and yellow — the colors of Earth and Paradise.

“You’re brave,” she said. And she patted Icarus affectionately.

“Who would not be brave after the example you set?” asked Mr. Stone, feeling as if he were being swallowed up in the depths of Susan’s eyes, into which he was gazing. . . . falling.

She did not reply. She continued to look searchingly at him. Then, with a nod of her blond head, but without a word, she touched Icarus with the whip, and disappeared down the road.

Mr. Stone followed her with his eyes, as long as he could. He saw the trailing cloud of dust rise, as he thought, like incense, and lazily drift away. He turned, sighing, but only to be petrified, as he met the strange, sombre glare of Doctor Alvin.

The chill traversed Mr. Stone anew. But he mastered his repulsion.

"Do you wish to drink, sir?" he asked.

"No," replied Doctor Alvin.

Mr. Stone was on the point of asking the strange horseman what he did desire, when Doctor Alvin inquired:

"Is your rifle loaded?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Stone, with a sudden vision of duels flashing through his mind.

"There's a squirrel at the top of that hickory tree," explained Doctor Alvin. "Lend me your rifle."

Mr. Stone passed over the weapon without a word.

Dropping the reins of his horse, Doctor Alvin threw the rifle to his shoulder; and apparently without taking aim, fired.

The gray little body came tumbling down like a heavy leaf.

"See if I barked it," requested Doctor Alvin.

Mr. Stone picked up the squirrel, noticed the light splotch — which Pete had explained to him, was

caused by the bullet going between the squirrel's crouching body and the limb on which it crouched—

“Yes,” he replied.

“Good day!” said Doctor Alvin, handing the rifle back to Mr. Stone.

The giant galloped away.

Mr. Stone sat down by the spring, and took his head between his hands — after the manner of the ancient Hebrews, when, toward the close of day, they sat themselves down at the curb of a well, in the land of their captivity.

Mr. Stone felt lumps in his throat, in his heart, and in his soul — ordinary, every-day, old-fashioned lumps.

My, My!

CHAPTER X.

THE first unmistakable evidence of Mr. Stone's love for Susan, was his hatred of Doctor Alvin.

You never really like a woman until you heartily dislike one of her relatives.

But what was the relationship between Susan and Doctor Alvin?

The gloomy miscreant loved Susan, Mr. Stone felt certain.

But in what capacity!

The more Mr. Stone wrestled with the question, the more it troubled him.

Finally terror came: Was the gloomy miscreant Susan's husband!

Then panic: Was this Susan's reason for refusing to disclose her identity?

"But," reasoned Mr. Stone, "I'm assuming that I'm not stark mad. I'm assuming that the woman

I met at the spring, is really the one who has been writing to me. I'm assuming that Pap and Pete can't tell the difference between a 'little bit 'a critter' and a gloriously magnificent queen of a woman. I'm assuming that the photographer ignominiously muddled his subject. I'm assuming, in short, a thousand preposterous things. . . .

"But the way that angel who rode the black horse, and had yellow hair, got next to me, is something remarkable. And her name is *Susan*! That blooming Don Quixote called her 'Susan.' And she *is* Susan, my Susan — or I'm a lunatic. . . .


"Maybe I *am* really crazy," thought Mr. Stone. "Folks never know when they're crazy. . . ."

And he cast about. Finally he hit upon a test that should decide his sanity:

"Pete," he announced, "I'm going to take the next train for New York. If I give you a dollar, will you attend to the mushroom beds while I'm gone?"

"Sure," replied Pete.

Mr. Stone led Pete to the cave. He explained that the temperature of the hotbeds had to be taken



twice a day, with the thermometer, and that the beds were to be covered or uncovered according as the temperature rose or fell.

"But, Pete," added Mr. Stone, with awful solemnity, and pointing toward Susan's prostrate statue, "if anything happens to that statue while I'm gone.... If you touch it, if — if Pup.... sniffs at it!"

Mr. Stone's ferocious look completed the threat.

The next morning as Mrs. McPheeters, Miss Norris's old governess, was tripping across the street toward the letter box, just opposite her three-room flat on the outskirts of New York, an apparently intoxicated countryman reeled heavily against her. Then, by way of excuse, the countryman took Mrs. McPheeters in his arms and affectionately kissed her once.

The kiss had not formed a part of Mr. Stone's original plan. It was the spontaneous expression of a gentle thought — kissing a maid for the mistress.

Mrs. McPheeters screamed and dropped the letter she was carrying. The countryman stooped, picked

up the letter, and hastily glanced at the address; then he proceeded to excuse himself winsomely:

He had taken Mrs. McPheeters for Heliotrope, he said. Heliotrope was the sweetest girl in Jersey. He always kissed Heliotrope when he met her. Heliotrope was too sweet for this world — and Jersey. Would not Mrs. McPheeters pardon him? Mrs. McPheeters was the living image of Heliotrope, he said.

And he bowed so low, he handed the letter to her so graciously, so humbly, so . . . so gentlemanly, that Mrs. McPheeters did not — call a policeman. She haughtily took the letter from the countryman's hand; she mailed it with dignity; and she never once looked over her shoulder as she tripped back to the flat — trying to walk like Heliotrope. But Mrs. McPheeters peered out cautiously between the curtains of her front room, to see if the gallant countryman was still in the street.

Mr. Stone had disappeared. There was no longer any possible doubt. The letter he had picked up was his own; and under Susan's name, it bore the revised address: "Cadiz, Kentucky."

As soon as Mr. Stone had given his order to a fashionable tailor in New York, he wrote to Susan that her picture had crazed him, that he had employed a private detective to follow Mrs. McPheeters and learn Susan's real address, that he was coming straight to Cadiz; that he was coming, he did not care what happened. He had to see Susan, father or no father. . . .

"The only valid reason you could possibly have for not allowing me to visit you openly," Mr. Stone wrote, "would be a reason that I cannot entertain for a moment. You are certainly not a married woman, Susan; else I am a raving maniac, life is a mockery, and pure womanhood a dream."

In reply came a letter of twenty pages, calling him "dear," naming him "dearest," asserting that he was an ugly boy, but refusing to see him even for an instant, either at her residence or elsewhere, until her *father* came back. "Father" was under-scored.

"We are looking for him every day," declared Susan.

She explained that a visit from her sweetheart,

before her father returned, might entail the most serious consequences.

"It would kill my mother," said Susan, simply — but mysteriously enough for Mr. Stone.

"The sight of me frightens horses and kills mothers!" he reflected.

"As to my husband," continued Susan, "kiss him in the glass for me."

Mr. Stone felt like really following her suggestion.

But he could not wait at New York until her father came back, he wrote. It required too long a time to exchange letters. He would go crazy.

"I've been waiting," he declared, "for thirty-five years and seven months —" this was Mr. Stone's exact age — "I can't wait any longer. I'm coming to Cadiz, and will stay at a hotel until your father comes back. I'll not disclose my presence, for fear of killing your mother; but I shall at least experience the joy of reading in the afternoon a letter you write in the morning."

Susan called him a mad ugly boy. She pointed out that there was no hotel at Cadiz. She lived on

a farm. Nor could he write to her from Cadiz. Only letters addressed by Mrs. McPheeters would be delivered to her. It wrung her heart, too, she said. She had been waiting so long — twenty-two years, five months and three days. But there was no way out of the difficulty. “Dearest” would have to stay at New York, and work on his new book, until father returned.

Mr. Stone had forgotten all about Turnbull. The allusion to the “new book” savagely refreshed his memory.

“Damn Tourne-Boule,” he invoked, solemnly, in the accents of prayer, rather than by the way of imprecation.

Mr. Stone observed that he hated Turnbull. Mr. Stone felt like “barking” Tourne-Boule. Mr. Stone was rapidly growing desperate.

He wrote back:

“Fate is the friend of all true lovers. What do you think I have found out? — It’s a remarkable coincidence. I have just learned that my old friend Tim Stone is raising mushrooms in a cave near Cadiz. Who sent Tim to that cave? — Heaven!

Susan, don't discuss the question. I'm going to visit my friend Tim. As to the post office and the hand writing of Mrs. McPheeters, we shall need neither. Hollow trees are the best letter boxes in the world. Designate some spot where I may find a letter awaiting me when I get to Cadiz. There ought to be a hollow log near the farm. If you refuse this favor, Susan, it is because you do not love me. I give you my word of honor that I will not disclose my presence until your father returns."

Susan wrote that she was frightened, that her heart was beating, beating.... beating with apprehension and love. She could not prevent him paying a visit to Mr. Stone. But a tragedy would ensue if her family discovered their relations. The story was too long to put in writing. If he came to Cadiz, he must never come near the farm until her father returned. Something, she knew not what, had already excited the suspicion of her family. She was being watched day and night. Oh, how frightened she was! And how her heart was beating!.... But there was a spring not far from

the cave, Campbell's Spring; and there was a scaly-barked hickory tree.... How her heart was beating! There was a hole in the tree about seven feet from the ground, on the side of the tree that was next to the road — She would hide a letter there as she rode by; and.... and he would place his answer there. How her heart was beating with apprehension and love!

Mr. Stone returned to Cadiz by the next train, arrayed in splendor — silk hat, frock coat, lavender trousers, white spats, high collar, and a cane. He was accompanied by two trunks, the contents of which had been carefully selected.

CHAPTER XI.

THE first thing that Mr. Stone did, in the vicinity of Cadiz, Kentucky, was to reach up and thrust his hand into the blessed hole which an energetic woodpecker, aided by the elements, had made in a hickory tree. Life was not a mockery.... A letter was there.

Susan's heart was still beating with apprehension and love. That was all the letter said in words. But love letters consist not of words. Love letters are those which have been touched by adored fingers, and grazed by coveted lips. Love letters are negatives, which your heart develops into a photograph. Love letters are the records of rhapsody, which your soul reproduces — after the manner of a Victor Talking-Machine.

Mr. Stone's high hat bumped against the sky, figuratively speaking; and as he entered the cave, it bumped in reality against a certain low place of the

vaulted ceiling where he should have stooped — bumped, it did, and fell to the ground.

Pete sprang forward and picked up the glossy stove-pipe, actuated more by curiosity than by politeness. He also brushed the dust from the hat, brushing the wrong way.

But Mr. Stone was happy. He gave Pete five dollars. He patted Pup on the head and called him “doggy.” He inquired after Pap’s health. Apparently he listened to Pete’s report on the mushrooms. But whether he listened, gave, patted, or inquired, Mr. Stone did not turn his eyes from Susan’s statue....

Mr. Stone smiled at the statue; he curled his moustache at the basket; and occasionally he nodded to himself — as all great artists do.

Mr. Stone was happy.

His happiness lasted until about three o’clock the next morning, at which unhallowed hour, he stood by the spring — and meditated. He had just dropped a ten-page letter into the blessed woodpecker’s hole. It was dark. Mr. Stone meditated....

In a few hours Susan would ride up to the hickory tree, and she would thrust her hand into that wood-pecker's hole. Where would *he* be when Susan rode up to the hickory tree, and thrust her little hand into the wood-pecker's capacious hole!

Where would he be! Where should he be!
Where *could* he be!

Sleeping vilely in the cave!

Oh, no.

Standing there by the spring in full view!

But he had promised not to disclose his presence until her father returned. Even if he had not promised, Susan could not know it was he; and she would never dare to take the letter from the hole in his presence. And even if all this were not true, how could he, how would he, how was he . . . ?

Mr. Stone's happiness deserted him, as he realized his untenable position

There he was — making love to a woman, under Turnbull's name. There was Susan making love to him, thinking he was Tourne-Boule. What would happen when she found out her mistake! Mr. Stone shuddered to think of it

"She will cowhide me. Her gloomy miscreant of an escort will shoot me. Icarus will trample my remains under foot. But what is still worse, Susan will . . . hate me!"

Mr. Stone was unhappy, that morning at three o'clock, just after he had dropped a ten-page letter into the blessed wood-pecker's capacious hole.

"She shall not see me!" he mused, bitterly, "No, she shall not see me! I'll hide myself in the bowels of the Earth. I don't dare to show my face — my homely face! Oh, Susan, black-eyed Susan, blond Susanne! Oh, dimpled Suschen, sister soul, darling angel, Susy, Sue!"

It was a cry of despair. Mr. Stone's soul was sinking into the bowels of the Earth. Dark was the night, but darker still the yawning gulf of the future into which he looked — and saw not Susan.

Mr. Stone snatched his letter from the cursed hole, and retreated to the cave — a fitting emblem of his hopes. He grew desperate, as the seconds linked themselves into minutes, and the minutes into hours. He had torn up his letter. It was now six o'clock. Susan was coming. She would gal-

lop to the tree. She would thrust her little hand into the hole, and he would not see her. Nor would there be any letter from him. He would be groveling in the bowels of the Earth.

Mr. Stone *was* desperate. Shortly after six o'clock, he seized a slip of paper and wrote:

"Susan, I am here within a hundred yards of you, but I am suffering anguish. I have reason to believe that you will not love me when you learn of certain facts. Swear you will love me, Susan, no matter what happens; and swear it at once, or I shall die. I cannot wait until to-morrow. Leave something in the hole as a pledge that you have sworn the oath. Leave a ring, leave something...."

Mr. Stone sped back to the tree, and stuffed into the hole the slip of paper, without putting it into an envelope, or even folding it. Then back to the cave and the bowels of the earth, where he struggled with himself for two whole minutes — two centuries. His strength was not sufficient. He raced back to the spring, madder than ever. Wildly he gazed about him an instant. And as the sound of

distant hoofs became audible Mr. Stone frantically leaped at an overhanging limb of the scaly-barked hickory-tree. He caught the limb. He drew himself up, silk hat and all, into the leafy domain of the squirrels and the birds of the air.

"Lord!" he had just sense enough to reflect, "Lord! That gloomy miscreant is going to see me and bark me! But I don't care. I'll fall at her feet, like a dying squirrel."

Notwithstanding, Mr. Stone took the precaution to hide himself in the leafy branches as well as possible. He chose a position which commanded a view of the wood-pecker's hole, and which would allow him to see Susan.

None too soon. He had scarcely chosen his position, when foam-covered Icarus shot into view, coming as the wind. Susan bent low over the saddle, and Mr. Stone saw that she was urging her horse on with the cowhide. He was wondering at her haste, when an explanation was suggested by seeing her repeatedly look back. She was trying to leave her escort behind, that she might take the letter from the tree, unobserved.

"And she has left him!" reckoned Mr. Stone, from his high perch, noting that her escort had not yet come into view.

Susan was there, flushed with excitement. Mr. Stone saw her guide Icarus to the tree, reach up, and draw his letter from the wood-pecker's hole.

Susan frowned slightly on seeing the crumpled slip of paper — a slight frown; but it congealed Mr. Stone's blood. She read the note, seemingly at a single glance, and all the color left her face.

The color also quit Mr. Stone's face.

She read the note again, this time more slowly. The blood came back with a crimson flush to Susan's face.

Mr. Stone flushed as he watched her.

Then Susan showed signs of nervousness. She felt her neck, her hat, her hair. She became more agitated each time she turned to sweep with a glance the lonely road.

She's trying to find something to leave me," correctly interpreted Mr. Stone. "Oh, my darling! She is going to leave me a pledge of her love!"

It was with difficulty that Mr. Stone restrained

an impulse to drop to the ground, at her horse's feet.

"Anything, anything, just so it is from my queen!" prayed Mr. Stone.

But he realized that he had made a difficult request of Susan. Her hands were gloved with what seemed to be a pair of evening gloves, which fitted tight and reached to her elbow. It would require at least a minute to remove such a glove, even supposing that Susan wore a ring underneath. Nor did she wear a breast-pin with the riding habit. She had no earrings.

Mr. Stone saw Susan halt her searching hand on a hat pin, which fastened a jaunty little riding hat to her yellow hair. She drew the pin out. Musingly she looked at it. And when Mr. Stone saw her touch the needlelike point, and shake her head, he knew full well that she was thinking of the superstition common to all peoples — that pointed and cutting presents bring bad luck to him who receives them.

Then Susan thought of her handkerchief. She drew it from her sleeve. She unfolded it. She

held it out at arm's length, and critically viewed it. It did not please her. She tucked it back into her sleeve.

Finally the sound of distant hoofs became audible. Susan's agitation was frenzy. What should she leave for this doubting suitor! She looked about her in despair. She wrenched from her riding habit a button, and she was dropping it into the hole, when to judge by a smile of triumph which seemed fresh from fairyland, an inspiration came to Susan. She reached down as if to touch her stirrup, hesitated; then she straightened up — apparently listening to what some fairy said....

But the beating of hoofs was close at hand. Susan looked back. She saw a cloud of dust which was rapidly approaching. She hesitated just another instant....

Then Mr. Stone saw what the queen of fairies could not have witnessed without a smile of approbation. The child of nature, the angel of heaven, reached down to her stirrup, raised her skirts like a flash, and unfastened a silver buckle just above the knee. An instant, and she had dropped her gar-

ter — a yellow garter — into the blessed, thrice-blessed wood-pecker's hole.

St. Vitus's Dance took possession of Mr. Timothy Stone. His limbs trembled. His head shook violently — so violently indeed that the new silk hat toppled and fell, bumped from limb to limb, and thence to the ground in full view of Susan.

Susan did not look up. To catch a glimpse of the shining beaver had been to bring her cowhide down in a great stinging lash on Icarus's sensitive flank. Black horse and blond lady shot out into the road and away, like a vision riding a demon.

Mr. Stone reflected that Doctor Alvin could now "bark" him at his leisure, and that Susan would not be there to close his eyes.

The thought was not calculated to cure Mr. Stone of St. Vitus's Dance. The whole limb on which he was seated began to shake.

But Susan's escort that morning happened to be Captain Malepeste. The good Frenchman gracefully galloped by the hickory tree, without so much as turning his head. Captain Malepeste seemed rather to hold his horse back than to urge him on. Cap-

tain Malepeste was also pleasantly smiling to himself, as if at peace with all the world.

But Pup had seen the hat fall. Not being familiar with stove-pipes, Pup came to pounce upon the shiny headgear, as he might have done upon a "varmint." Pete had rescued the hat, and was brushing it, as usual, the wrong way, when Mr. Stone cried:

"Pete, take Pup and follow the trail of that old chap who just passed here! I'll give you another dollar if you find out where he lives."

Pete and Pup disappeared down the road in the direction which Susan and Captain Malepeste had taken. Pete whistled. Pup yelped.

"Sir Timothy," observed Mr. Stone, drawing the precious article from the wood-pecker's hole, "Sir Timothy, Knight of the Garter!.... T. Stone, K. G."

Honi soit qui mal y pense.

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Pete returned, and told Mr. Stone that Susan's castle was not more than two miles distant, the Knight of the Garter realized that it would no longer be possible to delay the attack. He took counsel with Pete. Pete advised that Pap be consulted.

"Pap knows lots," he asserted.

"But it's so hard to make Pap talk," objected Mr. Stone; "and when he does talk, he either stammers or speaks French."

"If you work Pap right, he'll talk," promised Pete, "an' Pap knows lots."

"That's the trouble: I don't know how to work Pap."

Mr. Stone mused. He was sorely in need of advice — or rather of some one with whom he might intelligently talk over his case, if for no other reason than that of clearing up his own confused thoughts.

Mr. Stone felt that in his present mood, he was capable of committing a rash act.

"I'm ready to shoot or be shot," he said to himself.

He took from his trunk a repeating rifle, and filled the magazine with shells.

Pete's eyes glowed with covetousness when he saw the weapon.

Noting the boy's unwonted interest, a sudden thought came to Mr. Stone.

"Pete," he said, "this rifle is a present I've brought for Pap. Let's go and give it to him."

Pete led the way to the house, dancing for joy.

Squire Campbell received the present with dignity. He tried the weapon successfully on a bottle which Pete threw into the air. Then bringing forth a bottle, which he had not yet emptied, he offered Mr. Stone a drink.

"Thank you, Squire," replied Mr. Stone, "but I'm already drunk — with excitement."

Pap inverted the bottle, and drank down exactly one-half of the contents, in a musical gurgle. Then

extending a twist of tobacco to Mr. Stone, he declared :

“ It’s two years old.”

Again Mr. Stone declined, on the ground that his nerves were upset.

Squire Campbell bit generously of the twist, and lapsed into silence, not even once inquiring as to the cause of Mr. Stone’s nervousness.

“ He’s mixed up with a woman,” volunteered Pete, who, being profoundly grateful to Mr. Stone for the rifle, wished to show his gratitude by making Pap talk.

Mr. Stone shuddered at the way Pete expressed himself.

Squire Campbell observed :

“ No matter how bad they are, women are never so bad as whiskey. It’s better to run after women than to reel after whiskey. The worst women have a little good in them. The best whiskey is unspeakably bad — at any rate, that’s what the prohibitionists say.”

“ Oh, she’s not a bad woman,” exclaimed Mr. Stone. “ She’s as pure as an angel.”

"Marry her immediately," commanded Pap. "Marriage is a duty which we owe to society."

"But, Squire," said Mr. Stone, fervently, "I'm ready and anxious to do my duty toward society; but I don't know how to go about it."

He tersely narrated the history of his relations with Susan.

"If it were not that she thought I was another man," concluded Mr. Stone, "the thing would be easy. All I should have to do would be to go down there to her house some dark night, elope with her, and be married by the first preacher we met. But she would not elope with me. She doesn't know me. And if I write to her to tell her who I am, I shall never receive an answer to my letter!"

"No, it will not do to disclose your identity in a letter," agreed Squire Campbell.

"If I could only take her prisoner," exclaimed the Knight of the Garter, lawlessly, "and hold her in custody long enough to plead my cause, I believe I could persuade her."

Mr. Stone pulled his moustache.

"Your cave would make an excellent prison," observed Squire Campbell.

"Wouldn't it though!" exclaimed the Knight of the Garter.

"There's a big sink-hole in their yard," observed Pete.

"My son," remarked Squire Campbell, "Nature has endowed you with Sarepta's perspicacity."

Mr. Stone did not see the point, and fearing that if "Sarepta" crossed his mind, Pap would take another drink and go to sleep, he hastened to say:

"If I could only get Susan into the cave, and keep her there long enough to make her listen to me!"

"But my son has solved the problem," replied Pap, reaching after his bottle. "All that you have to do, is to palm off yourself some night as the agent of the other man, and induce the young lady to follow you into the sink-hole. Every sink-hole in this region leads to your cave."

Mr. Stone gasped.

"There's only one difficulty," continued Pap, "and that can easily be overcome. You must first

go from the cave to the sink-hole, underground, smoking your way as you go, else you would almost surely be lost in trying to find your way through the hundreds of underground passages which branch out between the sink-hole and the cave. You would neither be able to find your way back to the mouth of the sink-hole nor forward to the cave."

Mr. Stone shuddered at the thought of luring Susan into the cave, and then losing his way. Many are the stories told, in the cave regions of Kentucky, of people who become lost in these subterranean passages and never return to the light of day.

"That would be horrible!" he exclaimed.

"The difficulty is easily obviated," continued Squire Campbell, strangely academical, "by first finding the passage that leads from the cave to the sink-hole, and smoking a continuous line with your candle on the roof of the passage. You would follow this smoked line back on the night of the elopement. Candle smoke on the roof of a cave remains intact for centuries."

"But, Pap," objected Pete, "How's he going to find his way from the cave to the sink-hole?"

There's thousands of paths forking out in every direction down there in the cave."

"I could hardly expect you to discern that, my son," said Pap. "Your education has been neglected."

Turning to Mr. Stone, Squire Campbell inquired:

"You are familiar with the rudiments of land-surveying, are you not?"

Receiving an affirmative answer, Pap continued:

"First survey the outside route between the mouth of the cavern and the sink-hole. You can do this some night when the moon is shining. The distance is hardly more than two miles. Follow the bottoms and gullies in making your survey. These underground passages are beneath the bottoms, not under hills. They have been formed by water, and under the ground, as on the surface, water seeks its lowest level. These lime-stone strata, you know, curve with the hills."

Squire Campbell removed the cork from his bottle, and smiled at the amber-colored fluid — And of all the smiles that come out of the past to haunt me,

I know of none sadder than the smile I saw so often on Squire Campbell's bloated lips.

"When you have made your survey above ground," he continued, addressing Mr. Stone, "plat off the distance carefully on paper, using as large a scale as possible. Then with a compass and chain, follow out the plat in the cave. It will lead you to the sink-hole."

"If I had only thought to buy some surveying instruments while I was in New York," exclaimed Mr. Stone, in full accord with Pap's strange plan.

"I will have the necessary instruments here by to-morrow morning at ten o'clock," promised Squire Campbell, raising the bottle to his lips. "And . . . and the necessary costume also. It might be dangerous to wear ordinary clothes, and attempt a nocturnal survey of the premises of a man who can bark squirrels."

The bottle had already touched Pap's lips; he lowered it regretfully, and observed:

"While I think of it, I had better issue you a passport. You might meet a neighbor some night who would ask for your credentials. Or you might

get lost in the cave and unwittingly trespass on another's property....."

Pete clapped his hands.

Pap explained:

"My son had been begging me for weeks past to issue you a passport. But I mistrusted you until the other day at the spring."

Squire Campbell drew from his pocket a buckeye, and gravely handed it to Mr. Stone.

"Keep that on your person," he advised. "It wards off malaria, fever, chills, bullets, dirks, and divers other misfortunes. If you ever meet anybody who wants to know who you are and where you are going, produce your passport. Do not lose it. There is only one horse-chestnut tree in the country that bears such fruit. And there is only one branch on the tree that produces passports. The branch in question is a result which I obtained through budding. The tree is a result of grafting."

Mr. Stone was now thoroughly accustomed to being amazed. On looking closely at the buckeye which Squire Campbell had given him, he was hardly surprised to note a marked resemblance in

miniature to a human face: there were two spots for the eyes, a bump where the nose should have been, a dent for the mouth, and two protuberances that might have been taken for ears.

"The beauty about our passport," explained Squire Campbell, "is that it can be read in the dark by simply running the fingers over it.... Come back to-morrow at ten o'clock for the instruments and costume. If I stammer, my son will give you all needed information."

Pap emptied his bottle, and went to stretch himself at full length on the grass plot in front of his house.

"I told you Pap knowed lots," remarked Pete. "An' he knowed a lot mor'n that 'fore mammy died. Sarepta was *my* mammy."

They heard Squire Campbell snore.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUT there is one trouble with the best of plans — it may clash with some other plan equally well laid. We lie awake at night planning and praying independently one of the other. God in his wisdom takes charge of our prayers — sending rain on a certain day, or granting dry weather, though humbly besought for both. But our plans.... 'tis the devil who weighs them. We do not ask the Almighty to help us overcome a neighbor.

While the Knight of the Yellow Garter was planning his nocturnal survey of the damsel's premises, the keepers of the damsel were busy perfecting a plan of their own, whereby rustic chivalry might come to an end.

They were convinced that Susan had a suitor. She sighed without provocation. She spent hours at her toilet. She interpreted Chopin correctly. She wrote a letter every day.... Then her terrible beauty!

They thought of Julia and trembled. They recalled the oath on Julia's coffin, and they regretted the day that Miss Wentmore had come to preach to the whole household the doctrine of sentiment.

Colonel Norris had not yet arrived. Every letter announced his immediate departure from London. But every succeeding letter explained that urgent business had detained him.

What if the Colonel, on arriving, should find that a month previously — a week — even the night before — Susan had.... followed in the steps of Julia!

The thought drove them to desperation. They set a watch over Susan by day. At night they stood guard. Furthermore, every evening they arranged an alarm system of wires that should warn them of an attempt to approach the farmhouse.— Wires hid in the grass, like iron vipers! Neither Mr. Stone nor Pap had reckoned on such a contingency.

Mr. Stone had donned the costume of a rural marauder in Kentucky — a coon-skin cap, a grayish coat, ragged trousers, and a pair of moccasins.

With the moccasins, he moved as noiselessly as a serpent; at night the ragged trousers looked like weeds; the gray-tinted coat might have been bark on a tree; while a coon-skin cap is as completely invisible at dusk as was Minerva's helmet. Around his invisible coon-skin helmet, the Knight had fixed the yellow garter with its silver buckle, after the fashion of a hat-band. He had placed the garter there, thinking that he obeyed a lover's impulse — in reality it was the devil, dovetailing plans.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The moon was setting. And Mr. Stone had just completed his survey to the sink-hole in Susan's back-yard, when one of his noiseless feet came in contact with a wire, which held, nicely balanced, a series of sonorous cans. There resulted a Wagnerian climax. Mr. Stone fled. Doctor Alvin aimed at a silver buckle — the only thing discernible in the moving mass — fired, and brought down the coon-skin cap, which Susan's garter decorated.

Mr. Stone rubbed his smarting head as he ran. The buckle had saved his life, but the impact of the bullet had not produced an agreeable sensation.

"Courting in Kentucky is a risky business," reflected the grower of mushrooms.

Still he was happy. He had in his pocket the survey of the underground passage.

Ten minutes after the crack of Doctor Alvin's rifle, Mr. Stone reached the spring. There, to his astonishment, he found Squire Campbell in the act of taking a generous drink — not from the spring.

"Why, Squire, isn't it too dark to bark squirrels?" inquired Mr. Stone, noting that Pap had beside him not only the muzzle-loader, but the repeating rifle as well.

"I.... I.... I.... hhheard ssssome.... somebody.... sssssssss...."

"Lord," thought Mr. Stone, "Pap's sober!"

"Some.... some.... somebody sssshoot!" continued Squire Campbell, painfully.

He added:

"Take.... take.... take off.... ththththem duds, you.... you.... you's wearin', an'.... an'.... an' giv' 'em to me right.... right now, 'an'.... an'.... an' git in your cave qui....

qui.... quick as you can, an'.... an'.... an'....
an' go to bed!"

"Squire!" objected Mr. Stone, amazed at the
strange request.

"Quick!" repeated Pap, without stammering,
as the whiskey began to produce its strange
effect.

"Quick!"

This time Squire Campbell's tone was one of com-
mand.

Mr. Stone was dumfounded. But the metallic
click in Pap's voice, whatever it signified, meant that
the present was no time for discussion. The
already garterless Knight proceeded to divest him-
self of the loaned garments.

"Where.... where's the cap?" asked Squire
Campbell.

Mr. Stone raised his hand to his head, dazed.
Though he had repeatedly rubbed the smarting
scalp wound, he had not realized that the cap
had been shot from his head. To Mr. Stone,
the loss of the cap was nothing, but the loss of the
garter might mean.... Mr. Stone recalled the

calamities which Susan had said would befall her, if their courtship were discovered.

"Where.... where's the cap?" impatiently repeated Squire Campbell.

"Near that sink-hole in her yard, and.... and her garter is on the cap!" explained Mr. Stone, huskily.

This announcement seemed to make Squire Campbell all the more anxious to see Mr. Stone out of the way.

"Quick!" he thundered, without stammering a particle. "Dip your feet into the spring, and get into your cave as fast as you can, and go to bed; and.... here's your buckeye you're leaving behind, and your note-book!"

"Squire Campbell," asked Mr. Stone, as he took the buckeye and note-book from Pap's hand, "are these precautions directed toward my safety or your own?"

Pap was not expecting such a question. He looked at Mr. Stone a moment, batting his bleared gray eyes. But Mr. Stone was quite as unprepared

for Pap's answer, which was put in the form of two questions :

“ Haven't you already done enough to compromise the young lady? Do you want to clinch the matter? ”

Mr. Stone asked no further explanation. He dipped his bare feet into the spring, and then began to pick his way gingerly toward the cave. Looking back, he saw that Pap had drawn over his own clothes, the garments which Stone had discarded.

Mr. Stone entered the cave, and wearily was about to throw himself on his bed, as Pap had directed, when the sight of his note-book occasioned a thought which changed his lethargy into feverish activity.

The note-book contained the overland survey of the tortuous underground route that should lead from the cave to the sink-hole. . . .

If he could only reach the sink-hole before daylight — before the garter was discovered !

Mr. Stone began to plat off on paper the route which he had surveyed. His scale was an inch to the rod. His zeal was that of a madman. A work

of hours was completed in minutes. Then catching up a lighted candle, he started out, with chain and compass, to find the subterranean passage which should lead from his cave to the sink-hole — and the accusing garter.

With the candle Mr. Stone smoked a jagged line on the ceiling as he went.

Three rods, North by East, level....

But a huge stalactite blocked his passage in the third rod. Mr. Stone was obliged to measure the circumference of the stalactite at its base, calculate the diameter and add this to his survey.

Then straight on twenty rods, due Northeast, declination five degrees.... Mr. Stone found a declivity of twenty degrees, and he was again obliged to solve a problem in engineering.

Thirty-six and one-third rods, East by South, no slope.... Then the bats extinguished his candle. When he had lighted it again, he found a precipice, down which he was obliged to clamber — and calculate.

Finally, just as day began to break, Mr. Stone, bruised and battered, reached the mouth of the sink-

hole. He heard the cock crow. Then a horse neighed.

Mr. Stone dared to peep out.

No one was in view....

Gloria!

There, in a few feet of the sink-hole, lay the coon-skin cap with its crushed but glistening buckle....

Susan's name was still fair among women.

The Knight kissed his garter reverently. He clasped it about his neck for safer keeping. And he was then so bold as to look languorously toward the house which sheltered the damsel.

"Susan," he murmured, "black-eyed Susan, blond Susanne, dimpled Suschen, sister-soul, darling, angel, Susy, Sue...."

The Knight would have probably stormed the castle immediately, had not one of the most blood-curdling sounds that ever tore the silence of a roseate dawn, suddenly smote his ears, and caused him to retreat to the sink-hole.

"Why, that's a jackass!" exclaimed Mr. Stone, as the sound developed into something recognizable.

But it was well that he had retreated, even at a

donkey's bray. Human voices became audible, then the patter of horses' hoofs.

"They're saddling Icarus for Susy's morning ride," thought Mr. Stone, who having now recovered the garter, did not for a moment dream that his encounter with Dr. Alvin might be construed in any other light than that of the repulse of a common thief.

"Susy is going out riding....

"And I haven't left her a letter in the woodpecker's hole!" exclaimed Mr. Stone, as he remembered that he had not even thanked Susan for the priceless emblem of his knighthood.

The next instant he was hurrying back through the passage, following the smoked line as fast as bats and a flickering candle would permit.

He might be able to mail a letter before Susan reached the hickory tree!

The return trip consumed only half an hour. Mr. Stone had scribbled a few lines on a sheet of paper, and he was making for the mouth of his cave, when four shadows left four crevices, and glided toward him. In a cave, all moving objects

resemble shadows. But when they had seized him, he knew that they were men — a man to each arm, a giant to each leg.

They lifted Mr. Stone from the ground, as if he had been a child; and they carried him back from the mouth of the cave toward his bed.

The devil was dovetailing anew.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. STONE accepted the strange treatment without an outcry, and, in a sense, without astonishment. That which appears inevitable never seems unnatural. Souls make no objection to Charon, when he comes to ferry them over the Styx. However, Mr. Stone thought of his buck-eye; and after they had laid him on his bed, and pointed four ugly revolvers at different parts of his person, he asked of the bearded thing that was aiming at his head:

“My friend, may I reach down here in my right pocket, and remove a buckeye which is hurting me?”

They were the first words that had been spoken — and apparently were funny. He who had been sighting at Mr. Stone's head, and who seemed to be devil-in-chief, laughed in a deep bass voice. As his laughter died away, two other revolvers began

to tremble: baritone laughter resulted. Finally, the wiry-looking devil who was aiming at Mr. Stone's stomach, concluded the performance with tenor-like gayety.

"Be seated, Gentlemen!" invited Mr. Stone. "Be seated. You can shoot me sitting down as well as you can standing up. You are my guests, draw up — the bench."

The invitation excited the risibles of the guards still more than the illusion to the buckeye. This time they laughed in chorus.... but revolvers beat the time.

Mr. Stone felt encouraged. He continued, familiarly:


"Say, boys, I wish to goodness one of you would take this note out there to the spring, and drop it into a wood-pecker's hole you will find on the other side of that scaly-barked hickory tree...."

He still held, clenched in his hand, the note to Susan. Likewise does Charon find clenched in the hand of every ghostly passenger some earthly bauble which the pilgrim would smuggle into Eternity.

But Mr. Stone's four guards did not appreciate the situation. They laughed no longer. The devil-in-chief took from his pocket, with his left hand, a twist of tobacco, bit largely of it, then gravely handed the tobacco to a subaltern, who in turn bit and passed it on. The chew of the abdominal specialist was inversely proportionate to his voice: the tenor bit off the biggest piece of all. Then he handed the twist back to his chief and all four men began to spit rhythmically out into space, anywhere, everywhere, and sometimes at the legs of Mr. Stone's iron bed. But not a word, save those which the ugly revolvers whispered.

Mr. Stone fell to thinking of Susan. Mr. Stone was in love. Mr. Stone was insane.

"The route is surveyed," he thought. "The passage has been smoked. Little remains to be done. I will merely write on the typewriter that Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule of New York lies sick in my cave, ill, very ill, sick unto death; and that the aforesaid Mr. Tourne-Boule begs Miss Norris to come to him before he dies. All that she will have to do, will be to enter the sink-hole in her



yard. There she will find Mr. Timothy Stone waiting for her. Mr. Stone will conduct her to Mr. Tourne-Boule's bedside. She will find Mr. Stone thoroughly reliable. She will only be absent from her residence about one hour. She will run no risk of incurring her family's suspicion. The life of Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule might possibly be saved by her visit. . . . "

Mr. Stone had closed his eyes, that he might concentrate his thoughts. He was composing the speech he should make to Susan, when he had lured her into the cave. He would fall on his knees before her, he would grovel in the dust, he would look up beseechingly. . . .

Mr. Stone opened his eyes to practice the beseeching look — then he rubbed them. . . . in amazement.

The four guards had disappeared!

Mr. Stone jumped from bed and looked about him.

There was his desk, the typewriter, the chairs, the smoking coal-oil lamp. And there, still trickling down the legs of his bed, was what should have

troubled the soul of Sir Walter Raleigh. But the four guards had vanished as mysteriously as they had come.

Mr. Stone made a dash for the mouth of the cave. No one hindered him. He reached the spring. Squire Campbell was there in the act of emptying a bottle. But—were they squirrels which Pap had barked!

What monstrous squirrels!

Oh, he was mad now! He was stark mad....

The expression on Mr. Stone's face must have been startling, since Pap volunteered an explanation. Pap was now thoroughly drunk, and hence spoke fluently:

"Every one of them through the eye."

"What are they?" gasped Mr. Stone.

"Bloodhounds," replied Pap.

He continued, graciously:

"They were after you."

"After me!"

"Yes. They would have tracked you into the cave, if you had not changed your clothes and wet your feet."

"Then, Squire, you did all that to save *me!*"

"No," replied Pap, categorically. "No, I didn't. They were the sheriff's bloodhounds, and I did not care to have the sheriff's hounds learn the way to our cave."

"But what will they do to you for killing the sheriff's bloodhounds?" asked Mr. Stone.

"Nothing," assured Pap. "I was sitting under my own vine and fig tree barking squirrels. Hounds came up and tried to bite me. I killed them, all six. Then some neighbors happened along, and proved to the sheriff that I had been at home all night. 'False scent, false trail,' remarked the sheriff to Doctor Whats-his-name. Then Doctor Whats-his-name handed over a hundred dollars to the sheriff for the hounds, and went on his way, biting his lips."

"Were they some of your neighbors that held me in the cave?"

"Very probably. If you had come out here during the negotiations with the sheriff, Doctor Whats-his-name might have become suspicious."

CHAPTER XV.

BUT love is blind to all save love — blind even to veracity. The Knight of the Yellow Garter wrapped himself in the cloak of Ananias, and he proceeded to pen one of the most dastardly documents known to chivalry.

The manuscript was addressed to Susan. It related how Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule lay dying in Kentucky. There was dearth of woman's nursing. There was lack of woman's tears. But a comrade stood beside him, as malaria was carrying him off, and bent with pitying glances to catch his husky words: "Tell Susan, tell Susan that I am here. Tell Susan, and she will come." Then the false knight explained to the damsel, in what manner she might come. She should enter the sink-hole on the afternoon of the day that she received the letter. She would find him, the comrade, Mr. Timothy Stone, waiting for her in the sink-hole.

Mr. Stone would lead her to Mr. Tourne-Boule's bedside.

The document was run off on the typewriter. Mr. Stone signed his own name clumsily with his left hand. And the next morning before daybreak, he dropped the letter into the woodpecker's hole.

Mr. Stone had resolved to remain in the cave, and not importune Susan by climbing the hickory tree. But love laughs at resolutions, be they good or bad. The same tactics were repeated as those we have already witnessed on the occasion of the first letter.

Shortly after sunrise, the knight issued forth from the cave, quite hastily, clad in modern armor; and he climbed the hickory tree.

Mr. Stone pulled his silk beaver down so far that no amount of trembling might make it fall. Then the beating of hoofs in the distance, a cloud of dust, and

Luckily the beaver was on tight, else it had surely fallen to the ground. . . .

The horse was not Icarus, the woman was not Susan, yet they might have been: for, straight as a long-absent pigeon does fly to its cot, so straight

did the demoniacal horse and its frail rider make for the woodpecker's hole.

The young woman looked up, as she drew forth the letter, allowing Mr. Stone to see her face....

And Mr. Stone concluded that his sins had found him out.

"Oh, Lord!" he muttered. "You are Madam, and I.... I'm a blooming bigamist. Yes, I've got two—the madam and the goddess. This is Madam, the one that sent me her photograph, the one Pap and Pete saw.... the 'little bit 'a critter.'"

Where was Aphrodite, originally goddess of the dawn!

Hephaestus hung dying in Kentucky, high up in the air, rocked by the winds, jeered of cawing crows—Hephaestus, the homely, Hephaestus Timothy Stone....

Mr. Stone craved one single solitary wife: black-eyed Susan. She was enough for any man. But he had asked another to meet him in the cave!

"Well, let's be going, Daredevil," sighed, rather than spoke, the woman below.

Daredevil neighed instead of moving off; and he

pointed his ears in the direction of Mr. Timothy Stone.

"Daredevil," whispered the frail woman, as she buttoned the letter in her bosom, "Daredevil.... Daredevil...."

And what was Mr. Stone's astonishment to hear the woman sob:

"Dare.... Daredevil.... Dare."

And he saw tears run down her face.

The horse also heard his mistress sob, turned his head, and looked at her....

Daredevil neighed, then shook himself, as if to warn his rider; and the next instant, without having received a touch of the whip or a single tug at the reins, he leaped forward and sped away."

"Well," commented Mr. Stone, "my first wife isn't happy either."

He remembered that he had raved over the photograph of this woman. He had danced for joy in his sombre cave.

"She was my first love," said Mr. Stone, piously. "She it was who woke my slumbering soul...."

"But," he sacrilegiously grumbled, as he clam-

bered with difficulty to the ground, "But what in the devil has she got to do with me and my goddess!"

He added, in parody:

"Cursed is the man who sees two women spring up where he was figuring on raising one.

"She's butting into me and my Susan," swore Mr. Stone, quite unacademically.

Fancy explained:

"That is Susan's maid."

"How about the photograph?" inquired Mr. Stone.

Fancy suggested:

"She heard her mistress talk of you. She learned to love you. Maids may love. She substituted her own photograph for that of her mistress."

"What was she crying about?" asked Mr. Stone, curling his moustache, compassionately.

Fancy said:

"Because she would have liked to open the letter, and feel that it was meant for her."

"That's a fact," agreed Mr. Stone. "She didn't

open my letter. And if it had been Susan, she would have opened it right off."

Mr. Timothy Stone added, not to Fancy, but to himself: "She's a mighty sweet little maid.... I hope Susan won't discharge her."

All of which goes to show that lovers are masters of psychological analysis. Mr. Stone left the tree, accompanied, in his fancy, by Susan and a bevy of sweet little tearful maids — a maid for this and a maid for that, and Susan for everything. But Susan would come alone to meet him in the sink-hole. He did not for a moment doubt Susan's coming. That afternoon his fate would be decided.

Mr. Stone entered the cave, and set about making his toilet. He would have to creep through two miles of dusty underground passages, but that did not matter. It was important that he be carefully dressed. First impressions were lasting. First impressions.... the first impression.

Never in his life had Mr. Stone taken such pains in dressing. Never before had he parted his hair in the middle, put on shoes that were too small, and

squeezed his hands into gloves that prevented him bending his fingers.

About noon Mr. Stone was dressed — and feverish. He felt thirsty. He would drink a gourd of water before setting out. And he was issuing forth from the cave when he almost ran over Pete.

“There’s a man up there wants to see you,” explained Pete, “an’ an’ he’s a dude too.”

“He’s what?” asked Mr. Stone, absently.

“He’s a dude. He’s got one of them hats.” Pete pointed to Mr. Stone’s high hat.

“Tell him to come back next week, next month, next year” Mr. Stone was saying, when there happened the one thing in the world that was now capable of astonishing him.

It was the sound of a voice which Mr. Stone had known from infancy. The voice said:

“Hello, Tim!”

Then it was a clear, proud eye, a brown pointed beard, a haughty aristocratic bearing. In fine, it was Tourne-Boule.

“Jim,” said Mr. Stone, weakly.

Mr. Tourne-Boule also appeared to be astonished

at finding Mr. Stone dressed in the height of fashion. He looked Mr. Stone over from head to foot, uneasily.

"How are your mushrooms coming on, Tim?"

"Damn my mushrooms!"

"Have you already made your fortune?" asked Mr. Turnbull, nervously.

Tim glared at Jim.

"I see you have heard about her," proffered Mr. Turnbull.

"Heard about whom?"

"Miss Norris."

"Miss Norris?" thundered Mr. Stone, turning pale, "Miss Norris? What do you know about Miss Norris?"

"I know that she's the lady whose address I sent you," replied Mr. Turnbull; "and what may be equally important, I know that she's the sole heir to five million dollars."

"Susan. . . . five million dollars!" cried Mr. Stone, aghast.

"Oh, I'm quite sure of it," continued Mr. Tourne-Boule, with a tinge of triumph in his voice.

"I obtained the news from a banker. Colonel Norris, the father of Miss Norris, has a credit of one million pounds in London."

"A million pounds.... and in a sink-hole!"

Sweat rolled down Mr. Stone's face.

"In a sink-hole?" puzzled Mr. Tourné-Boule.

"Yes," continued Mr. Stone, glibly, as if thoroughly crazy, "Yes, in a sink-hole. I have an engagement with Susan this afternoon in a sink-hole. You're dying. You have the malaria. You're in the cave. I'm going to lead Susan to your bedside to hear your last words. Then you're going to die. We'll bury you, and I'll marry Susan. Susan hasn't any five million. Susan is my sweetheart. I'm going to marry Susan. I love Susan. Susan is my wife. Do you hear? I'm going to marry Susan. Susan is going to marry me. You're going to die of the fever. We'll bury you all right, but I'm going to marry Susan. Susan is my sweetheart...."

A look of genuine horror spread over Mr. Turnbull's face. He removed his high hat, mechanically, and placed it on the ground between him and Mr.

Stone. Just as mechanically Mr. Stone removed his headgear and placed it beside Mr. Tourne-Boule's beaver. — What this act implied, I do not know.

And they were looking fixedly at one another, were these two childhood friends, when Daredevil came to join the council.

Daredevil's coming had been sudden indeed; and it had ended in a mighty bound which left him trembling, neighing, and wet with sweat, within but a few feet of the two men.

It was a bad day for Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule of New York.

No sooner had Daredevil come to a halt, than a frail woman, whom Mr. Stone recognized as the one that had carried off his letter, slipped from the back of the horse, and threw herself into Mr. Turnbull's limp arms.

"Oh, Jim, you're dying!" she cried.

Mr. Stone smiled, he knew not why.

"Jim, have you got malaria?"

Mr. Turnbull shook.

“You’re dying, Jim, and you sent for *her*! Oh, Jim, *my* Jim . . . and you sent for *her*!”

The frail lady wept on the bosom of the dying man.

Mr. Stone was no longer a bigamist. His breast swelled with contentment.

“Sir Timothy,” he invoked mentally, “Sir Timothy, Knight of the Garter, Limited. T. Stone, K. G., Ltd. — Limited to one, by the grace of God.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“**J**IM,” sobbed the frail lady, “I’ve inherited fifty thousand dollars, and Colonel Norris has made me a present of Daredevil — You must not die. We’ll live on a farm. You’ll keep on writing great books. We’ll be so happy. But, Jim....”

The frail woman’s voice rose to a shriek — as the voices of frail women sometimes do.

“Jim, what did you write to *her* for?”

She held Mr. Turnbull’s face between her hands. She looked into his eyes. She waited for his reply.

“To.... whom?” stammered the wretched man of letters.

“To Susan.”

“I haven’t written to.... to Miss Norris. There stands the man who has been doing the writing. It’s Tim.... Tim Stone. He signed my name.”

“Oh-h-h....”

Lucile had fainted on Mr. Turnbull's bosom, but she had kissed him before she said "oh-h-h!"

Mr. Stone beamed brighter than a morning star. His countenance glowed as radium. — Madame Curie found the substance, I discovered the emotion.

"Don't stand there and snicker like an idiot!" observed Mr. Turnbull, savagely, to Mr. Stone. "This..... this woman has really fainted. Can't you bring me some water to throw in her face? — And take this infernal horse away....."

Daredevil was politely rubbing his nose against Lucile's back and, incidentally, showing his teeth to Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule of New York.

Mr. Stone led Daredevil away, and hitched him to a tree. Then he fetched a gourd of water from the spring.

Mr. Turnbull laid Lucile on the ground. He threw the contents of the gourd into Lucile's face, ragingly. Then, with the indifference of a great surgeon, Mr. Tourne-Boule took a cigar from his pocket, lit it and began to smoke.

Mr. Stone was not accustomed to seeing women faint. While the man of letters smoked, the grower

of mushrooms bent over Lucile, unlaced her, fanned her, even called her endearing names. . . .

"Where's Jim?" asked Lucile, opening her eyes.

"He's here," replied Mr. Stone.

"He isn't dead?"

"No. He's all right. I wanted Susan to meet me in the sink-hole. I told her that Jim was dying. I'm a fool."

"I'm so glad!" replied Lucile, closing her eyes again, and leaving Mr. Stone to doubt the reason of her gladness.

Miss Wentmore, however, opened her eyes immediately and said, with a start:

"But Susan loves Jim! Where's Jim?"

"Great Heavens, man," exclaimed Mr. Stone to Mr. Turnbull, "can't you come here and talk to your sweetheart!"

Mr. Turnbull sauntered up, with the cigar between his lips.

"Lucile," he explained, "my nerves are racked."

And Mr. Turnbull calmly sat down by the side of his sweetheart.

"Poor boy!" said Lucile, sitting up and taking

one of Mr. Tourne-Boule's hands, "Poor boy! Everything is in a muddle. It's enough to run you wild. But it will not be long before we clear up the matter."

"Let's clear it up right now, let's go and see Susan," proposed Mr. Stone.

"Oh, I wish we could!" invoked Miss Wentmore, "But I am afraid we shall have to wait awhile...."

"For what?" asked Mr. Stone, "Wait for what?"

"The confusion is greater than you think," explained Lucile. "When I got back to the farm from New York, I found everybody and everything in an uproar; and I was nearly crazy myself.... You know, Jim, Uncle Milton, who wouldn't let us have a cent when Papa failed! — Well, what do you think he did? — He died and left me fifty thousand dollars, and that's why I had to go to New York...."

Miss Wentworth caught her breath.

"Was that the cause of the uproar at the farm?" asked Mr. Turnbull.

Lucile took a fresh start:

"No indeed. They had found out that Susan was writing to somebody, and Doctor Alvin was going to shoot the man down as soon as he found him.... You know Susan had a sister who—who was too pretty; and they were going to shoot the first man that said boo to Susan...."

"Boo," said Mr. Stone, solemnly.

"And I was afraid Doctor Alvin would go to New York and shoot Jim," declared Miss Wentmore.

"Boo," continued Mr. Stone.

"And I was nearly crazy anyhow, because Susan had sent on my photograph, as we thought, to Jim...."

"But boo! boo!" insisted Mr. Stone.

"Oh, they won't shoot you now," promised Lucile; "because Colonel Norris has come back and released Doctor Alvin from his oath—his oath to shoot folks. And Jim, I was wondering what you would say when you got my picture...."

"Are they still in an uproar at the farm?" asked Mr. Stone, who felt that he had the right to put a

few questions. "Is that why you came for my letter, this morning? And how is Susan? Are they worrying her in anyway? She hasn't been thrown from her horse, has she?"

"Boo! Boo!" cried Miss Wentmore, laughing. Then she said:

"Susan is all right. I was so afraid Doctor Alvin would go to New York and shoot Jim, that Susan and I fixed up a scheme. We told the family that the man Susan was writing to was *my* sweetheart, not Susan's. That's the truth, but Susan doesn't know it. Where I fibbed a little, was in letting Dr. Alvin think that they were my letters which Susan sent to Mrs. McPheeters every day. But I was afraid Doctor Alvin would make Jim fight a duel — and kill him. Doctor Alvin is a dreadful man. . . ."

"Well," commented Mr. Stone, "of all the complicated situations! Susan's family thinks she has been sending your letters to Jim. Susan thinks that I am Jim. . . ."

"But I haven't told you everything," interrupted Lucile. "Yesterday, when Colonel Norris got

home, and we told him about the matter, he insisted on inviting Jim to his house at once. He said Susan's house was my house, and that he wanted me to invite Jim immediately. You know Susan and I adore each other. . . . "

"Has Colonel Norris five millions?" asked Mr. Turnbull, with some little show of interest in what Lucile related.

"I should not be surprised," answered Lucile. "He bought an old copper mine in South Australia for little or nothing, found a new vein, and sold it for a fabulous sum. Captain Malepeste showed me a check for two hundred and fifty thousand dollars which the Colonel had given him."

"*Given* him!" exclaimed Mr. Turnbull, "You mean, given him as a cool present?"

"Oh, I suppose so. They're old friends. And, Jim, the Colonel intimated that he wished to take charge of my trousseau when. . . . when. . . . "

"That *will* be nice," said Mr. Tourne-Boule, dryly.

"But I haven't told you everything," resumed Lucile, "Let me go on. When Susan read Mr.

Stone's letter this morning, about your having malaria, she became frantic...."

"What did she do?" asked Mr. Stone.

"She came very near disclosing the secret. And she's waiting now to hear from.... from Jim. I'd better go and tell her everything is all right. But...." continued Lucile, wringing her hands, "how am I to explain that sink-hole letter!"

Mr. Tourne-Boule, as we have already noted, was a man of genius. He had been thinking rapidly and intensely. He lifted up his voice, and said:

"Lucile, dear, go at once and tell Miss Norris that I am in perfect health. Explain to her that I am visiting my old friend Tim. You might add that for a month past, I've been under the strain of finishing a new book, that having given malaria to the hero, I became so influenced by my imagination that I contracted a slight chill myself. Tim thought I really suffered from malaria...."

"But, Jim," interposed Lucile, "hadn't I better tell Susan, right away, that you're really *my* sweetheart, and that Mr. Stone is the one who has been writing to her?"

"No," replied Mr. Tourne-Boule, smiling. "It would hardly do for *you* to tell her. I'm the one who should tell her...."

"Away off!" exclaimed Mr. Stone, hotly. "I propose to take charge of that myself. I'll tell Susan."

"Tim," observed Mr. Tourne-Boule, in a voice that suggested the violincello, "Tim, I've known you all my life. You're the best friend I have in the world — except Lucile...."

Here Mr. Turnbull gallantly bowed to his sweetheart. He continued:

"Tim, I have analyzed your characteristics in 'Oak and Palm.' The analysis has found favor in the eyes of Miss Norris. I believe that if you allow me, I can prove to Miss Norris that you are superior to my book...."

"Oh, Jim," cried Lucile, clapping her hands in glee, "how generous, how chivalrous! And you will make Susan love Ti.... Ti.... Mr. Stone?"

"I will make Miss Norris love Tim," promised Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Stone did not appear to share Lucile's enthusiasm. He asked of his friend Jim :

"But at what stage of the game do you propose to tell Susan that she has been writing to me?"

"Just as soon as I see that you have made an impression upon her," promised Mr. Turnbull, solemnly as ever.

He added :

"Of course you'll have to show me the correspondence, and make me familiar with the situation, so that I may watch over your interests intelligently."

"Tim was looking straight at Jim. The latter suavely asked :

"Tim, do you mistrust your boyhood friend?"

"But say, Jim," offered Mr. Stone, "what are you going to gain by all this? — You're putting yourself to a lot of trouble."

"My boy," replied Mr. Turnbull, "are you so deeply in love with Miss Norris that you fail to see my reasons? Recall that it was through my instrumentality that you began to write to Miss Norris, that it was from the picture I painted of you, in

‘Oak and Palm,’ that Miss Norris first learned to love you. We literary men have pride. If I could really point to the marriage of a wealthy heiress with one of the noblest of men, and say: ‘My book did that,’ I should be the proudest author in America. Why, Tim, old boy, your marriage with Miss Norris would be a monument to my genius!”

And Mr. Tourne-Boule laughed innocently as a child. I never knew a man of genius whose laughter was not painfully childlike.

“Jim, you’re just too great for anything!” exclaimed Lucile.

Mr. Stone was not a genius. Neither was he a child. He laughed bitterly.

“You know, Tim,” continued the genius, “while I am advancing your interests with Miss Norris, I shall count on your looking after mine with the dearest little woman that ever lived. . . .”

Mr. Turnbull took one of Lucile’s hands, and gracefully kissed it. He continued:

“In paying court to Lucile, you will not forget, Tim, to conjugate your verbs in the third person, singular, masculine — ‘He’ loves. Lucile is so

fascinating! I know that the first person will have a tendency to well up in your heart. And you're a handsome dog — stalwart six-footer! Lucile, may I trust you?"

"I'm going to begin by making you jealous," declared Lucile, a happy woman — the most radiant of all the angels. "I'm going to make you jealous, and say 'Tim' instead of Mr. Stone. Tim, you look so strong, help me on Daredevil. I must go at once and tell Susan that *her* sweetheart, Mr. Tourne-Boule, is here visiting *my* sweetheart, Mr. Stone...."

Mr. Stone did feel his heart tremble a little bit, in spite of his love for Susan, when gracious Lucile pleadingly looked at him, and called him "sweetheart" — the dearest word in our language.

She extended her foot to Mr. Stone, expecting him to clasp his hands into a stirrup, as Captain Malepeste did. But Mr. Stone was not a courtier. He was only a lover. He did what he would have done for Susan under similar circumstances. He lifted Lucile bodily from the ground and placed her on Daredevil's back.

Mr. Turnbull smiled as he watched the scene. When Lucile had drawn up the reins, he said :

“ Tell Miss Norris that, with her permission, Mr. Stone and Mr. Tourne-Boule will drop in for tea this evening.”

“ Hadn’t you better wait until to-morrow ? ” asked Lucile.

“ Oh no ! ” laughed Mr. Turnbull. “ The sooner we begin, the sooner the farce will be played. I must confess that I hardly relish the idea of allowing Tim to pay his attentions to you indefinitely.”

Lucile blushed and rode away.

“ He’s terribly ugly,” she decided, as Daredevil galloped along the shady road ; “ but he is awfully strong ! He’s the kind of man to carry you out of a burning house.”

Miss Wentmore evidently was not thinking of Mr. Tourne-Boule.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. Turnbull continued to smile in that uncanny way peculiar to Chinese and to men of genius — He smiled as he took his silk hat from the ground, and fastidiously brushed it. He smiled as he followed Mr. Stone toward the cave. He smiled, finally, as he smiling stopped and smiling inquired:

“Tim, what in the name of goodness is the matter with that boy?”

Mr. Stone had been neither seeing nor hearing. Brought back to reality by his friend's question, he perceived, not twenty paces away, Pete and Pup, who were performing acts of agility.

Pete was turning handsprings, somersaults, and backheaders. Pup was gyrating after the manner of these wonderful lambs which bad artists draw in children's picture books.

Mr. Stone heard hips, whoops, and hurrahs, barking, and growls. It was as if the Hallelujah

Chorus and an Intermezzo from Tannhäuser were being simultaneously performed in a circus ring.

"What's the matter, Pete?" Mr. Stone asked.

"Pap's got one too!" cried the boy, at the top of his voice. "Pap's got one too, hurrah for Pap! My Pap ain't no dam' dude's nigger, hurrah for Pap!"

And Pup took up the chorus, apparently saying in canine language:

"Yep, yap, boowah, Pap! Boowah! Boo!"

"Got what?" asked Mr. Stone, of Pete.

"Got a gal," explained Pete, sobering down somewhat.

"A.... what?" inquired Mr. Turnbull.

Pete scowled at Mr. Turnbull, as if refusing to hold communion with a person who had not been formally introduced.


But turning to Mr. Stone, Pete condescended to repeat his statement:

"My Pap's got a gal too."

"Where did he get her?" inquired Mr. Stone.

"Up there on the road," said Pete. "An' she's hot stuff."

"Tim," observed Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule, smiling more graciously than ever, "all this is really wonderful material. If Pup, Pete and Pap were incorporated as background into a story, you being the protagonist, and Miss Norris the heroine, the effect would be striking. It was a good day, I believe, for American letters when I purchased a ticket to Cadiz — Tickets, please! Go where you please, do what you please: Oh, the joy of a literary life! Oh, the mad wild fire of genius, unhampered by thoughts of gain or glory, undisturbed by sordid publishers, unmindful of dumb proof readers, damned public, and the caitiff critic — yea, unmindful of all, even woman's charm or bankers' millions, but moved to ineffable joy by bars of translucent sunlight filtering through a forest, and filled with rapture at a single line dashed on the blue heavens by a God-breathed cloud! Money glory, aye, but my mission! Time, death, eternity — all that is, was, and will be, I know not of. Only do I feel my mission! — feel, but do not understand — feel a force I cannot measure, perceive a voice I cannot hear — mad murmurings mingled with a



sigh, the ghost of Eden's music murdered at man's fall from Paradise. My mission is to see the voice, lest it die, and then, perchance, to write, to. . . ."

But as Mr. Tourne-Boule lowered his eyes from heaven to earth, he espied afar off that which made his smile fade out, and his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth.

"To. . . . to. . . ." he spluttered twice.

Then pallor, heartsickness, quavering collapse!

Mr. Turnbull was wretched to look upon.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked Mr. Stone.

Pete was wiser, and looked in the direction of Mr. Turnbull's fixed gaze. . . .

It was not a serpent, but a woman. She came leaning on Pap's arm. And Pap's bearing was such as to strike Pete dumb with admiration. . . .

Not the dragging, listless step of a drunkard, not the stooped shoulders of a sluggard, nor the rolling head of a degenerate. Squire Campbell walked proud as a cavalier, a span taller than was his wont. And the grace with which he guided his lady's footsteps past jagged stones and jutting roots, would have adorned the floor of a royal ball-room.

"My Pap! . . . " murmured Pete, swaying from side to side, "My Pap! . . . an' he's got a gall!"

Pete had reason to be proud. The lady at Squire Campbell's side seemed a panther, but recently uncaged — so lightly did she touch the ground. She seemed an evening's bride, hesitating at every step, yet eager to go on; and when she paused before an obstacle in her path, drawing back, though still playfully clinging to her cavalier's arm, she seemed the embodiment of a hot caress momentarily withheld.

"Tim, for God's sake, help me out of this!" whispered Mr. Turnbull, as he regained the power of speech. "You won't go back on your boyhood friend, will you, Tim?"

Mr. Turnbull was clasping Mr. Stone's arm.

"What in the devil . . . "

But Mr. Turnbull had no time to answer questions. He whispered, excitedly:

"That's the Countess coming there. She's followed me from New York — my scoundrelly janitor must have told her. She follows me everywhere. She's wrecking my life. She's a vampire. She's

a tigress. She's a demon. I borrowed a thousand dollars from her. I...."

Mr. Stone and Pete and Pup considered that the peal of silvery laughter which issued from the Countess's lips as she espied Mr. Turnbull, had been wonderfully well executed. Not so, however, with the man of letters. Mr. Turnbull gnashed his teeth in unconcealed rage.

"Why, Jimmy Jacquot!" she exclaimed, in mock astonishment, "I thought you were in New York."

The Countess laughed again, so sympathetically that Pup yelped in unison. As she laughed, the Countess said:

"My dear Mr. Campbell, let me introduce to you Mr. Turnbull of New York."

While the two men were exchanging bows, the Countess unceremoniously turned to Pete, and put her arm about his neck:

"You're Pete, aren't you, darling?"

She drew the boy's head to her, stroking his hair.

"Yes'm," gasped Pete, "Yes'm, an'.... an' that's Pup!"

"What a brave dog!" cried the Countess, taking a seat on the grass, and drawing Pete down with her. "How strong he looks.... Here Pup!"

When Pup had come up, she put her other arm about Pup.

"I'm left out as usual," Mr. Stone was muttering to himself, when he caught the Countess's eye.

She looked straight at him and smiled winsomely.

Mr. Stone could not help bowing.

Then she nodded, with that backward movement of her head, and half-closed eyes, which means: "Come here."

Mr. Stone obeyed. He looked around, bewildered, wondering if he should stand or sit.

She said softly, still holding Pup and Pete with either arm:

"Please pull my skirt down over my shoes. I can't move with these two angels in my arms. And you know my hoof is cloven. I don't dare to show my feet."

When he had covered her ankles, and taken a seat nearby, she asked:

"What is your name?"

"Timothy Stone."

"Why, then, you're 'Tim,' the hero of 'Oak and Palm!' Shake hands...."

"Yes, I'm the man," replied Mr. Stone, wondering what new trouble the book had in store for him.

He extended his hand, gropingly, toward the end of the arm which encircled Pete.

"I mean shake my foot!" explained the Countess, laughing. "You're jealous and want me to let Pete loose. But I shall do no such thing. Shake my right foot. That's all you'll get."

She continued: "I'm Annie Clark. In New York I'm the Countess Benedetta di Tòrrida, but.... Come here, Mr. Campbell, and sit down. Let Jim stand if he wants to. But.... but I am tired being Countess. I'm going to be Annie Clark once more. I was born on a farm in Ohio. I got to be an Italian Countess after I got the best of a New-Yorker who tried, but failed, to get the best of me.... But I'm tired of all that. I thought I was tired of everything, until I came down here to Cadiz.... I was born in a house that looked like Mr. Campbell's — an old tumble-down house.

Oh, dear old mortgaged home and its crust of bread.... and my old gray-headed daddy!"

Here the Countess suddenly unloosed Pup and Pete, made the sign of the cross, and began to recite *mea culpa*.

Pete understood but little of the strange tale which the Countess had narrated. He understood not at all her Italian-Latin. But.... a boyish sob rose up and choked him — the boyish sob of a motherless boy.

The Countess heard Pete's sob. Her own sorrow left her. She looked at the boy a moment, then she asked:

"Mr. Campbell, do you take boarders?"

"Madam," replied Pap, bowing to the ground, "I receive guests, and I should esteem myself the most honored of men if you were to accept my humble hospitality. You spoke a few minutes ago of having been tired of everything until the sight of my hovel brought back to you the memories of your childhood. Would it offend you to know that when you touched my hand, and ignored my squalor, I too forgot my present, and remembered days when

I had hoped, loved — lived, in fine, and been other than the wretch I am. My house shall be your castle, if your imagination can but make it so. My son and I are your servants. Command us with a look."

The Countess burst into a peal of laughter. And Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule, who had been inwardly studying the situation with all the acumen of a trained psychologist, saw fit to join in the Countess's laughter. But Mr. Stone and Pete, guileless children, listening to their hearts, hung their heads, moved to shame at this thoughtless mangling of Pap's better self at the hands of the mocking Countess and cynical Mr. Turnbull.

Mockery, however, is frequently another form of admiration. Mr. Turnbull had forgotten this when he joined in the Countess's laughter at Pap's grandiloquence. He saw his mistake when it was too late. The tigress of a woman sprang to her feet, pale with honest American anger. But she expressed herself after the manner of an Italian, shaking her clenched hand in Mr. Turnbull's face:

"It is you.... you, who are a wretch! How

dare you laugh at this honest man — you who never had a generous impulse in your life!”

And looking from Mr. Tourne-Boule’s finely chiselled features to the ravaged face of Squire Campbell, then back again to the man of letters, she continued:

“*You* are drunk with conceit. You’re bloated with selfishness. Your eyes are bleared with envy. You’re too mean to love even liquor, Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule! You’re a.... a.... you are your grandfather’s sepulcher.... You.... Bah! don’t tremble like a whipped cur, Jimmy Jacquot. I’m not going into details, and tell these gentlemen how you keep your sacred promises. And I’m not going to worry you about that last thousand dollars. *Ecco....*”

The Countess fumbled a moment at her bosom, finally caught a slender gold chain, and pulled until a silken wallet came to view. In this she proceeded to search with two of her slender fingers. Not finding what she sought, she tore open the delicate bag, in a movement of impatience, disclosing a compressed package of bank notes, nothing more.

"I thought I had it with me," she observed.

Then as she shook the treasury certificates, and a slip of paper fluttered out, the Countess cried:

"*Eccola!* your precious *cambiale!* And this is how I value it. . . ."

The Countess tore into bits the promissory note of J. J. Tourne-Boule.

"A present, my boy!" she exclaimed, laughing. "One of the little presents I make every now and then to Jimmy."

With this, the Countess turned her back on Mr. Tourne-Boule, and said:

"Mr. Campbell, I've ruined my purse. Won't you keep my money for me? You and Pete will have to do the spending, anyway. I can't be always running to Cadiz. By the way, I wish you would send Pete right off for some gingham aprons. I'm going to cook supper to-night, and I'll soil my frock. And say, Pete, buy me some wide-toed slippers, number 3, and get us a hammock, and buy the biggest, brightest, brassiest dog collar in all Kentucky for Pup, and have your hair cut, darling, and spend fifty or sixty dollars on something you'd like awfully

to have.... Oh, how happy I'm going to be! Go on, Pete! I'll kiss you when you get your hair cut.... "

Squire Campbell was the first to regain his composure. He was holding out at arm's length the package of bank notes which the Countess had thrust into his hand. When she had ceased speaking, he handed the money to Mr. Stone, saying:

"Please count this, sir."

They were five-hundred-dollar bills, new and crisp. There were ten in the package.

"Five thousand dollars," announced Mr. Stone, returning the money to Pap.

Squire Campbell buttoned the money in his ragged coat.

"Miss Annie," he said, "my son and I are going up to the house to get things straight. May we leave you with Mr. Stone until tea time?"

The Countess sighed:

"It's worth five thousand dollars to have somebody call me 'Miss Annie!' Jim, why didn't you ever think of calling me 'Miss Annie?'"

As Mr. Turnbull came forward, in deep humility,

to take the Countess's hand, Pap and Pete and Pup stole away.

"Jim," said the Countess, sadly, as Mr. Turnbull kissed her hand, "it was the sight of five thousand dollars that moved you to tenderness."

"I admit it," replied the man of letters, in the studied accents of theatrical tragedy.

"And while you're telling the truth, hadn't you as well confess, here in the presence of Mr. Stone, that you've never cared a snap of your fingers for me — that it was only my money you loved?"

The lines that made up the smile on Mr. Turnbull's face, assumed the form of a spider. He replied:

"Strictly speaking, your surmise is correct. I have never loved you. I am incapable of love. What is love? — an idle dream, a twilight hour, a lull in the fortunately fitful tempest of some lives. But my dreams are my wares, which I must sell to earn my bread. I have no idle dreams. Twilight is my noonday, when I must lie in wait to catch subtle fantasy. And as for lulls. . . ." Mr. Tourne-Boule laughed bitterly. "Lulls!" Mr. Tourne-

Boule laughed gayly. "When my lull comes, Annie.... '*Otello fu!*' Do you remember how Tamagno used to sing those two words?"

And in a voice that Tamagno would not have been ashamed to acknowledge, Mr. Tourne-Boule sang Verdi's inspiration.

"Don't sing in Italian," observed Countess Benedetta, "or I'll think of Tòrrida and get mad. But you haven't yet explained how your lofty genius can fall so low as to worship the Golden Calf — Do you remember, Jim, how Plançon sings '*La ronde du veau d'or?*' How does that first line go?"

It was meant as a taunt.

Mr. Turnbull replied:

"I do not sing bass."

He added:

"Yes, I worship gold. Money is all that this world can give me. I care not for the rest. With money, I could fulfill my mission. With money, I could unlock closed hearts, and steal their mysteries, probe souls and learn their maladies, unravel convoluted brains, remove thought's viscera, and learn the secret of my epoch, which lies buried somewhere,

hidden beneath a mass of gold. Every age has its touchstone. Once 'twas thought, then 'twas workmanship, now it's money. Once 'twas war, then a pastoral, now it's money. Once the Pyramids, then a Milo, now it's money. 'Twas bronze, 'twas marble, but now it's gold. You cannot understand the regime of the Medicis, and be ignorant of art. You cannot feel the period of the Reformation, and be an infidel. You cannot think to-day, unless you think in dollars and cents. Money!... Ignore money, and you hark back to the mouldering past. Aye, my mission, which must be fulfilled, *coûte que coûte!*"

"Jim, talk English," observed Countess Benedetta di Tòrrida.

"And, woman," cried Mr. Tourne-Boule, fiercely, "do you know what brought me to this lonely spot? Do you know what wrenched from my fingers an inspired pen, and tossed to a New-York gutter the holy leaves of a cherished manuscript?"

"My thousand dollars," offered the Countess.

"Do you know," continued Mr. Turnbull, without wincing in the least, "Do you know what made

me prevaricate, what made me deceive you, what made me. . . . ”

“ Lie,” prompted Benedetta.

“ Yes, lie,” echoed Mr. Tourne-Boule, “ ignominiously lie. And for what reason? ”

“ There’s somebody down here in these woods who has a bigger fortune and who’s a bigger fool than I. That’s the reason,” replied the Countess, kindly.

“ Quite true,” replied Mr. Turnbull, embarrassed an instant by the Countess’s perspicacity. “ Quite true, true! But what you do not know, is that I am striving to capture this prize for another — a prize of five million dollars, mind you — five mighty millions milled in gold, sunshine solidified, happiness’s storage battery, attar of pleasures — and all for another! ”

“ For whom? ” asked Benedetta.

“ For my friend here, Mr. Timothy Stone. Let me present him. . . . ”

The laughter that issued from Mr. Tourne-Boule’s lips, suggested the odor of sulphur.

He continued hastily:

“What is my object? Love for Tim? — No, selfishness. I am bloated with selfishness, I am drunk with vanity, my eyes are bleared with envy.... This young woman, worth five millions, read my book, wrote to me, laid bare her soul, and offered me her all — five millions. I sent the letter to Tim, with instructions that he should sign my name. Under Tim’s skillful management, the young lady’s love has turned to passion. I am here to unmask the childish subterfuge and say: ‘Children, be happy. God bless you,’ say: ‘Oak and Palm,’ my masterpiece, did that,’ say later on, when evil days have come, ‘Tim, friend of former years, give me of thy table’s crumbs that I may eat.’ And while I am doing this, while I am on the point of refusing a five-million-dollar woman’s love, because I know that I am incapable of returning her love, while I confer gratuitously this boon on another, and turn my back on gold, which I love more than any man ever did, because I need it more,— just as I am consummating what will doubtless be the great and glorious sacrifice of my bitter life, you come Annie, Annie Laurie, ruthless child of cynicism and product of wrecked

lives, you come and hiss me, revile me, curse me,— but I must be about my mission. Tim, keep Countess Benedetta till I return.”

And Mr. Turnbull strode away.

She of Tòrrida laughed in Italian — which means low and suggestively deep.

“Where’s he going?” she asked of Mr. Stone. Mr. Stone replied:

“We had an engagement to take tea with Miss Norris. He’s going to keep his engagement.”

“Is it true that she has five millions?”

“They say so.”

“Did he know who she was, when he sent you her letter?”

“I think not.”

“Nor I either,” agreed the Countess, grimly.

Then she looked Mr. Stone over, carefully and thoughtfully, as if he had been a new picture she was inspecting.

“If you were half as handsome as you are big and mournful-looking,” decided Benedetta, “Jim wouldn’t stand much show for the five millions!”

“What do you mean?” demanded Mr. Stone.

"Why, you're not big enough fool to believe Jim, are you?" asked the Countess, in amazement.

Mr. Stone had been feeling apprehensive, but to have this woman deal with his suspicions as facts, made his blood run cold.

"Is . . . is Jim a scoundrel?" he asked.

"The biggest I ever knew," replied Benedetta.

She added, parenthetically:

"And I've known lots of 'em in my time."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON arriving at the farm house, Mr. Tourne-Boule was formally introduced to the family as Miss Wentmore's suitor. And he acted the part to perfection. . . .

Jim was so funny!—All his old foolishness, which he had lavished on Lucile before the Bear Attack on the Stock Exchange; all his queer poses, and airs of a literary man.

Even Captain Malepeste was dumbfounded—and fascinated.

Mr. Tourne-Boule had scarcely entered the drawing room when he abruptly took from his pocket a writing pad, and dashed off two stanzas of polished lyrics. . . . which he had composed three years previously.

"You know," he explained to the astonished family, after declaiming his verses with a wealth of gestures which rendered Captain Malepeste insignifi-

cant, "You know, fantasy is all I possess. I sell it to earn my bread. Those two stanzas will bring me five dollars. That will buy me—a fountain pen."

Susan laughed in spite of herself. Susan was wretchedly embarrassed. There, within a few feet of her, talking and gesticulating, was the man to whom she had confided her dreams. She had never seen him. She did not dare to look at him. She wondered that he should be so gay....

Women, like capitalists, prefer that the custodian of their treasure be thoughtful and sedate. And some few beautiful women are misers—some very, very few—hiding and hiding and burying their beauty, as a miser does his gold. Susan had deliberately put on the meanest dress she had: a cheap cotton thing, white, with black dots.

"But, child," Lucile had exclaimed, immediately after the presentation, "why didn't you dress? You make me ashamed of myself—Here I have gone and put on all the finery I had!"

Susan had bowed stiffly to Mr. Tourne-Boule, without looking at him. Then taking her father's

arm, she had unceremoniously turned her back on the man of letters.

“That’s the effect of her scientific education,” whispered Captain Malepeste, scandalized, to Doctor Alvin.

But Doctor Alvin appeared radiant — if such a strong adjective may be used to depict a gloomy joy.

Colonel Norris was smiling, never laughing; listening, rarely talking; seeing, never staring; acting out, in fine, to perfection, the rôle much vaunted now-a-days of a travelled man — one, namely, who has left bits of his heart where sheep leave their wool: on the thorns of their devious passage.

The gravity of Colonel Norris’s discourse served as an admirable background to Mr. Turnbull’s eccentric wit.

“Ah, Colonel,” the man of letters had cried, “you great financiers are also dreamers. You conceive of some mighty project, which embraces a continent.— You dream a dream, and instead of five dollars, you realize five millions. Feel then some pity, have a little compassion, for us poor men of letters, who barter away our masterpieces for a bowl of pot-

tage, and a few kind words.... My publisher is at present in Maine on the proceeds of 'Oak and Palm.' "

Something that burned, flashed through Susan's heart at the mention of "Oak and Palm." How many times had she read the book! She knew whole chapters by heart. And that finely chiselled face on the fly-leaf....

Susan looked closely at Mr. Turnbull for the first time, and she was pained to observe that her chevalier was small.

Was that little man Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule! Susan rubbed her eyes — and her heart.

But the closer she looked, the smaller Mr. Turnbull grew: his breast contracted, his shoulders drooped, his legs dwindled....

As compared with her father, or with Doctor Alvin, Mr. Tourne-Boule was a little bit of a man. By the side of Captain Malepeste, he seemed a mere boy; compared with Captain Bisherig, a frail child.

The finely chiselled face with its brown beard, was all that remained of her dream. What had

blighted her hero's body! Why had Mr. Tourne-Boule deceived her with false measurements!

Susan's embarrassment changed to contempt — contempt for Turnbull, contempt for herself.

“To think that I have been loving such . . . such a little monkey!”

Still, if Mr. Tourne-Boule's body was short and thin, his wit was prodigious. By the time tea was served, he had gained the sympathy of everybody in the house — save Susan.

“Ah, my boy,” Captain Malepeste observed, enthusiastically, to the man of letters, “all that comes from you having French blood in your veins!”

But Mr. Tourne-Boule had had a German maternal ancestor — to the delight of Captain Bisherig. However, it was to America — he averred, holding aloft his tea cup, in the gesture of a toast — it was to America that he attributed all his genius: to America, welded from the best of all nations, riveted with bolts of liberty — strong, strange country, whose mysterious destiny lay as yet hidden even in the mind of God . . .

“Think of it,” cried Mr. Tourne-Boule, springing

from his seat at the table, and growing taller as he spoke, "Think of it! . . . Here we are — German, Frenchman, Englishman, Yankee, Confederate, white and black — Mr. Tourne-Boule waved his hand at the negro waiters — protestant, catholic, free-thinker . . . all of us Americans, by the grace of God Almighty, and looking into the eyes of the fairest women on Earth! Gentlemen, let us drink to our pure women! Women, drink to men whom honesty has ennobled, and industry knighted! Americans, stand firm, and drain a non-intoxicant cup to the intoxicating glory of America!"

Captain Malepeste arose and drank down his cup of tea, with a flourish. Lucile was agitated. Susan made bread-pills.

Mr. Tourne-Boule looked about him, appealingly, sat down in apparent confusion, then observed:

"My friends, I beg your pardon. I am unworthy of your attention. I am but a Bohemian, an enthusiast, a rolling stone, a simple-hearted man of letters, who forgets, forgets all . . . save his mission."

It was with great difficulty that Miss Wentmore

restrained an impulse to embrace Mr. Turnbull publicly. She was proud of her poor Bohemian who was so rich in fantasy.

"Isn't he charming?" she whispered to Colonel Norris.

And shortly after tea, Colonel Norris called the novelist aside, and asked about his baggage. He would send a man for it. Mr. Turnbull should have two rooms, a riding horse, and a negro servant at his disposition.

"You must not refuse my hospitality, however humble it may be," continued Colonel Norris. "As you doubtless know, I have just returned to America after a long absence. I am a stranger in my own country. If you and Miss Wentmore were to leave us, I hardly know what we should do. My English bankers are urging me to bring my family to England, and. . . ."

"England," cried Mr. Turnbull tragically, "perfidious Albion, never!"

Colonel Norris continued, smilingly:

"Captain Malepeste thinks we should settle down in Paris."

"Paris. . . . is Paris," explained Mr. Turnbull, in a tone which meant still more than the adjective *perfidious*.

"Captain Bisherig leans to Dresden or Munich," the millionaire went on to say.

Mr. Turnbull made a wry face, which obliterated Germany.

"I see that you are a patriotic American," observed Colonel Norris.

"America," declared Mr. Turnbull, "is the only country I have yet found where I can clasp a man's hand, and feel sure that he has no intentions on my money, my honor, or my life."

"You must be careful," rejoined Colonel Norris, as he glanced toward Captain Malepeste and Captain Bisherig, "or you will have to fight two duels before you go to bed."

Mr. Turnbull shrugged his shoulders in a way that had been handed down in his family for two hundred years.

"Do you take an interest in architecture?" Colonel Norris asked, abruptly changing the conversation.

"Architecture is an art, I am an artist," replied Mr. Turnbull.

"I am going to buy up a thousand acres or so around here," remarked the millionaire, carelessly, "and have a country house built for the sake of old times, no matter where we may go eventually. My daughter has passed her childhood here, and she feels attached to the place."

"An idea born of love!" exclaimed Mr. Tourne-Boule, enthusiastically, as he noted the carelessness with which Colonel Norris spoke of buying "a thousand acres or so."

He added:

"And I know of no spot more worthy of Miss Norris's affections. This is a beautiful country, sir."

"I'm glad you think so," said the old man, warmly. "I should be delighted if you'd ride with me to-morrow morning, and help to select the farms I should add to my tract. I shall ask Miss Wentmore to show off Daredevil, and my daughter will ride with us too.

"And," Colonel Norris continued, "you see I'm

getting old; I had almost forgotten what I had in mind when I spoke to you about architecture — if you and Miss Wentmore have any particular architectural dreams which you would like to see incorporated into a country house, I'd be pleased to have them executed.... You know we'll need a guest house or two on the estate."

A thousand acres or *so*!

A guest house or *two*!

Oh, yes, he undoubtedly had the five millions in spite of the fact that his daughter dressed in cotton.

Mr. Tourne-Boule slept sounder that night than he had ever slept before in his life. It had certainly been a good day when he purchased a ticket for Cadiz, Kentucky. Tickets, please!

And never a thought of Mr. Stone and the Countess crossed Mr. Turnbull's mind until the next day about noon, when Colonel Norris's little cavalcade — composed of Mr. Turnbull, the Colonel, Captain Malepeste, Miss Wentmore and Susan — drew rein at Squire Campbell's tumble-down shanty....

Colonel Norris had bought ten farms that morning, with a simplicity of procedure that thrilled Mr.

Tourne-Boule to the core. "Do you like that place, Susan?" the Colonel would inquire; and when his daughter assented, Colonel Norris would ask Lucile for her opinion. Afterwards he would say: "And you, Turnbull?" in the same manner that he said: "And you, Malepeste?" The financier had dropped the *Mr.* The novelist felt himself already a member of the family: "I believe I should include that farm in the tract, Colonel," he invariably replied. Mr. Tourne-Boule would have bought the State of Kentucky. He was drunk with enthusiasm.

They all agreed on Squire Campbell's farm. And Captain Malepeste was crying Hello! Hello! at Pap's gate, when Mr. Tourne-Boule was shocked beyond measure to see Pete protrude his head through a paneless window frame.

It *was* Pete. Mr. Turnbull recognized him in spite of the splendidly trimmed hair and new suit of clothes. With Pete, came thoughts of the Countess — that cursed woman. . . . Benedetta.

"Who owns this farm, sonny?" inquired Captain Malepeste.

"Pap," replied Pete.

"Where is Pap," continued Captain Malepeste, gayly, while Mr. Tourne-Boule shook.

"He's in here," assured Pete.

"Tell him to come out."

But Squire Campbell had already emerged from the house, hat in hand, graciously bowing. And what was the company's astonishment to hear him say:

"Good morning, Mr. Turnbull. We had almost given you up. Dismount. Introduce me to your friends. Ladies and gentlemen, the honor you do me will be engraved on my heart. . . ."

Pap had recognized Susan. Extending his arms, he said:

"Madam, permit me. . . ."

Before anyone could enter a protest, Susan leaped, laughing, to the ground.

"I want a drink of spring water," she declared. "Come on, Lucile!"

"Why, this will never do in the world!" cried Mr. Tourne-Boule, in a tone that caused everybody to look at him in surprise.

He added, stammering:

"Miss Norris should . . . should not . . ."

"Not enter my house?" blandly inquired Pap.

"Why not? I'm an old neighbor."

Turning, Pap continued:

"I fancy this is Colonel Norris. I'm glad to see you, sir, and know that you have returned to Kentucky. My name is Campbell. Your daughter has frequently ridden by my place."

Colonel Norris dismounted and shook hands. He introduced Pap formally to Susan, Lucile and Captain Malepeste. Seeing that the man of letters still hesitated, Colonel Norris observed, familiarly:

"Come along, Turnbull. I should like to have a little chat with Mr. Campbell. There are several things which Squire Campbell, in his capacity of old resident, might clear up for me, if he would only be so good."

Mr. Turnbull crawled rather than leaped from his horse. And as they entered the tumble-down house, all his apprehensions were realized . . .

A lady wearing a blue gingham apron over a much fashioned gown of voile, advanced smiling to meet them:

"Are these your friends, Jimmy Jacquot?" she sweetly asked.

Consternation.

"Present them to *me*," continued the lady, stressing the *me*.

And she fixed on Mr. Turnbull a look that was not quite so smilingly sweet. Mr. Turnbull knew the look full well. It was a menace, it was the glare of a tigress. . . .

Mr. Turnbull began, faltering:

"Coun. . . . Countess Benedetta di. . . . di Tòrrida, this is Colonel Norris, Miss. . . . Miss Norris, Miss Wentmore, Captain. . . ."

But the Countess interrupted the presentation with the remarkable statement:

"Miss Wentmore, I have often desired to meet you. We shall like each other, I'm sure."

With this, the Countess turned toward the kitchen, and cried:

"Tim, oh Tim, come here a minute!"

Mr. Timothy Stone, guileless infant of thirty-five — and subtle grower of mushrooms, had been induced to peel potatoes, that morning, back of the

house. He had not noticed the approach of the cavalcade. Nor had he heard the monotonous pecking of the energetic woodpecker which was drilling a new hole in the scaly-barked hickory tree. Mr. Stone had not seen the mystic autumn sunlight, which was kissing the pale leaves, and whispering the promise of spring — a better world. He had neither seen nor heard. Mr. Stone was feeling, that was all — feeling and peeling, peeling and feeling, peeling his heart, feeling potatoes. Susan was too rich for him. Susan was too pretty for him. Then Turnbull, the Countess had proved, was a scheming, mercenary scoundrel. Nothing remained but his own ugly self — nothing but his solitude and Pete, Pup and Pap. Not even his mushroom spawn had sprouted. There was nothing on Earth for Timothy Stone. He was loveless, dreamless, and moneyless; heartless, soul-sick, and ugly. When the Countess, to amuse herself, had asked him to peel potatoes, he had assented. He had gone out, back of the house, where only Pup, the yellow dog, might see him; and he had sat there in silence, feel-

ing and peeling, feeling his heart, paring his soul of its idle dreams. . . .

“Tim, oh Tim, come here a minute!”

Mr. Stone entered. He wore a blue flannel shirt. His trousers were stuffed in top boots. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbows.

“You’re perfectly lovely like that,” cried the Countess, as she noted the look of dismay which spread over Mr. Stone’s face at the sight of Miss Norris.

“Isn’t he handsome, Miss Norris?” the Countess asked. “Look at his arms and neck!”

’Twas what Zeus had said to Aphrodite on presenting leather-aproned Hephæstus.—’Tis an old, old story, this story of beauty and brawn.

Meanwhile Mr. Stone was blushing, and desperately endeavoring to button his Byronic collar. He only succeeded in unfastening another button of the blue flannel shirt and disclosing still more of Hephæstus. . . .

A whole chapter of “Oak and Palm,” and one which Susan knew by heart, was being reënacted.

“Tim,” pleaded the Countess, who seemed to be

immensely enjoying the scene, "Tim, don't be angry with me. You're a great big angel. I wouldn't do anything in the world to hurt your feelings! But, take my word for it, there isn't a woman here who is not already in love with you."

Possibly they were: for the Countess knew all about love, and its mysterious laws. However, the look of amazement on Colonel Norris's face was rapidly changing into one of anger. Noting this, Mr. Turnbull observed:

"Colonel Norris, I regret that your daughter should have to witness this scene.... I...."

"And why do you regret it, Mr. Jimmy Jacquot?" inquired the Countess.

In French, the diminutive *Jacquot*, from *Jacques*, is the type name of parrots and monkeys. Mr. Tourne-Boule hated the word *Jacquot*.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he observed, turning his back on the Countess, "I feel constrained to protest against the familiarity of this.... this woman."

But Mr. Tourne-Boule could not turn his back on Benedetta's laughter. Nor could anybody else. It was as if quantities of pearls were falling broadcast

on a chime of silver bells — so wonderfully did the Countess laugh.

“Colonel Norris,” laughed Benedetta, “I am a bona-fide American, relict of an Italian nobleman....”

And she paused a moment to laugh off a gay requiem for the repose of the soul of the good Italian Count. Then she continued:

“I know personally most of the literary set in New York. I have lent money to many of them....”

And the way the Countess laughed, suggested that lending money to literary men was great sport.

She admitted:

“I have known Mr. Turnbull ten years and....”

“Colonel Norris,” interrupted Mr. Turnbull, controlling his voice with difficulty, “some years ago this.... this woman became infatuated with one of my books. She has dogged my steps ever since. She followed me from New York.... This is one of the penalties we literary men have to pay

for our popularity. Colonel, may I lead Miss Norris to her horse?"


"I've known Mr. Turnbull ten years," resumed the Countess, as calmly as if she had not been interrupted, "and this is the first time our meeting is not due to *his* solicitation. . . ."

Her laughter sounded wonderfully truthful. She resumed:

"I'm down here on a sort of picnic, with Pete and Pup. I was attracted by Mr. Campbell's house which resembles the one where my father died. I gave trouble to my father. He loved me. His memory is. . . . all I have to cherish. You have a daughter, Colonel Norris. . . ."

Colonel Norris had — and had had a daughter, a wayward one. Something in the utter recklessness of the Countess's frankness, recalled thoughts of Julia. He had seen Julia defy conventionality, and he had loved Julia to the end.

Nothing that the Countess had said or done caused such profound amazement, as when white-haired Colonel Norris stepped forward and took the Countess's hand. . . .



For a moment he did not utter a sound. Then turning to Captain Malepeste, Colonel Norris said, simply:

“Isn’t she like Julia!”.

Timothy stole a look at Susan.

Susan laughed at Timothy, looking him squarely in the face.....

Damnation!

CHAPTER XIX.

IT was at this conjuncture that the motor force of the locality began to make itself felt on the heterogeneous elements which chance had brought together. Every locality has an influence peculiar to itself; and to this influence is due the difference in temperament which may be observed between one people and another.

Kentuckians are no stranger than what seems ever to have been the strange influence of their land. The Indians called the place *Kentucky*, which means "The Land of Blood." And all their war-paths converged on this strip of land between the Mississippi, the Ohio, and the Cumberland. The early white settlers plowed up arrowheads. Their children played with flint spears. "Moonshiners" resulted — a term originally applied indifferently to any defiant law breaker. Nor do the moonshiners of Kentucky to-day confine their efforts solely to

making, drinking and selling illicit whiskey. They are the great exponents of the doctrine of decentralization. They believe in the right of a community to establish its own laws, independently of any central authority. Moonshiners abide willingly by the laws which they themselves enact. They joyfully break all others. But the only foreign law with which they come in close contact, and, hence, which they oftenest violate, is that imposing a tax on the manufacture of whiskey.

Moonshiners, as a rule, care no more for intoxicants than other Americans. They merely insist that they have as much right to make whiskey as they have to make meal. They have raised the corn, and it is theirs. Let the central government restrict the production of tobacco, as is the case in France, and the Kentucky moonshiner would continue to plant his tobacco crop as usual, shooting — quite naturally, as it appears to him — any officer of the law who might dare to interfere. In short, the moonshiner is a man who proposes to be free. It is only in his method of obtaining emancipation that he differs from ordinary lovers of liberty. And he

has inherited his methods from the Indians who preceded him in The Land of Blood.

Moonshiners are practically invisible. You might live a life-time in Kentucky, and never come face to face with a moonshiner. But you feel him everywhere. He is present in spirit — as well as spirits. He lurks in the flash of Kentucky women's eyes — which is quite as deadly as the flash of their brother's fire-arms. He is manifest in quick gestures, good markmanship, artistic profanity, and sensibility to woman's charm. He loveth, drinketh, cheweth, shooteth, cusseth, and fiddleth all the days of his life — doth the moonshiner.

He will not disturb you, provided — as in the case of Mr. Stone — he becomes convinced that your mission on Earth is one of producing mushrooms. Try to buy up his land, however, without explaining your motive — as in the case of Colonel Norris — and you expose yourself to the gravest suspicion: that, namely, of being associated officially with the central government.

As fast as Colonel Norris and his party left a house, after having submitted an offer, the owner

of the property seized a rifle and went forth . . . to hunt. But the chase proved tiring that morning. By noon, every landholder whom Colonel Norris had approached, was solemnly chewing tobacco in a large, vaulted chamber of Campbell's Cave, the existence of which Mr. Stone had never dreamed. Each one had come accompanied by a dog and a relative. Men and dogs were squatting on the floor of the cave, about an enormous pine torch, whose sputtering, as it burned, constituted the only sound that was distinctly audible. Rifle barrels protruded from the circle like the projections on a pin-wheel. Not a word from the men. Not a growl from the dogs. Only the mammoth torch, driven into the ground, burned and sputtered as if raging with anger.

The torch had burned half way to the ground (which meant to the men that the sun, outside the cave, had crept through a quarter of the sky since the torch had been lighted) when every dog in the place suddenly sprang up, growling and snarling as if at the approach of an enemy. And an enemy came, in the shape of a yellow,

bounding, four-footed creature, which leaped nimbly into the circle of light, and forthwith proceeded to deliver battle to whatever desired war. For a few seconds it was one great mass of squirming, biting, growling dogs. Then canine shrieks of pain began to rend the air. At every shriek a combatant retired to lick his wounds. Finally only one dog remained in the lighted circle. It was the late arrival — Pup. Pup shook himself carelessly, as if whipping a dozen dogs was a common incident in his life. Then he stretched himself out to sleep in peace near the sputtering torch.

Squire Campbell was not long in following Pup. And if his appearance was not greeted with growls and bites, it was none the less marked by a sudden outburst of angry voices. Practically every word was an oath. Every sentence was a threat.

Pap brushed through the group of men as carelessly as Pup had passed the circle of dogs. Then lifting his clenched hand for silence, Squire Campbell shouted, without stammering:

“What yer raisin’ all thisher hell for?”

It was a call for new business on the part of the Chairman.

And startlingly new business was laid before the house....

A three dashed man, *canis filius damnatus*, was buying up all the farms in the locality, and was going to run them — the men — away, and break up their legitimate and sociable traffic. They had told him, the three dashed man, that they would sell, yessirree; but they would see him in the sulphur mine first, yessirree, because he was a “hella-ver collicter” — the latter meaning “revenue collector.”

“He done tried to buy mine too,” explained Squire Campbell.

Pap was not in an academical mood.

“An’ ain’t you mad?” queried a chorus.

“Naw,” replied Squire Campbell. “Naw, I ain’t.”

If a bomb had exploded in their midst, the consternation would not have been greater than that produced on the men by Pap’s negative statement. They sprang to their feet and crowded about Squire

Campbell. Then, as they began to finger the triggers of their rifles, more positive than ever, Pap continued:

“Naw, I ain’t.... an’ what ’ave ye got to say about it?”

This challenge had gone unnoticed for fully a minute, when a gruff voice suddenly proposed:

“What I’s got to say, is you’s in cahoot with....”

The bass voice ended in a gurgle, as Pap’s fist shot out, landing on the man’s throat. He fell as so much beef. Squire Campbell bent down, jerked the gun from the man’s nerveless hands, removed a dirk and revolver — all with the quickness of a prestidigitator — then straightening up, he asked:

“Is ther’ any more of ye what’s hossin’?”

No more of them were horsing.

“Squir’,” began amicably a baritone, “we done been knowin’ for nigh on twenty years as how you’s the best man of us all. You can shoot quicker an’ hit harder ’an iny of us. We all knows that. You’s chief. We respects you. But when you says as how

you ain't sorry to see us rin out our cabins an' broke up, we don't somehow kinder ketch on.... see?"

"Now, Bill," remarked Pap to the baritone, extending his hand, "you's talkin' like folks."

Bill hastened to shake hands, inwardly relieved. The others did likewise.

"If that ther' Buck Nelson," continued Pap, pointing to the man he had knocked down, and who was now beginning to stir, as if coming to his senses — "If Buck Nelson had 'a talked like that he wouldn't have that ther' crick in his neck now. There's right many ways o' talkin'...."

"———!"

There certainly was.

The kind they then heard caused every man present to cock his rifle, and peer anxiously into the gloom.

It was the "talking" of a rifle — which the echoes of the cave multiplied until there resulted a broadside.

"Put out that ther' torch, an' git on your bellies," commanded Squire Campbell.

The order was obeyed with military quickness. A great black wave swept out from the bowels of the earth and filled the vaulted chamber with liquid night. The flutter of bats' wings began to be heard among the dying echoes of the cave. Then came the sound of a distant struggle, a shrill scream, weeping....

At the first notes of the crying, Pup became unmanageable.

Each man was holding back his dog. Pap was holding Pup. But it was in vain that Squire Campbell patted Pup's head and whispered: "Pup.... Pup...." The dog growled ferociously, reared and plunged. It was all that Pap could do to hold him back.

"You'd better stab him," whispered a tenor to Squire Campbell in the darkness.

Pap's reply was an oath, which meant: "I'll die first."

Then as a peculiar whistle rang out in the distance, the tension vanished, as if by enchantment.

The men rose to their feet.

"You want 'em here?" questioned Squire Campbell.

The chorus assented.

"Light up," commanded Pap.

And forming a trumpet of his hands, Squire Campbell blew a difficult signal, which suggested the upper notes of a trombone.

The torch sputtered anew victorious, driving back the darkness. Pup, loosed now, shot forth like a winged thing in the direction of the crying.

"That's mighty curious, I never seed Pup carry on that ther' way," Squire Campbell was observing, when the cause of Pup's anxiety come into view.

It was Pete. And Pete was crying. His progress was slow. Pup was leaping on him, over him, and between his legs, as he walked, trying to lick his master's tearful face. When he was in speaking distance, Pete sobbed out:

"I.... I.... couldn.... couldn helpt tellin' her — she done kissed me so."

Squire Campbell appeared to be the only one who understood Pete's confession. Squire Campbell turned pale.

"Where is she?" he cried.

"They's holdin' of her," explained Pete.

Pap's hands flew to his lips; and the signal which he blew, was as strong and fierce as any that Roland ever sent vibrating from the ivory Olifant.

This time the signal was heeded.

Two men came into view, escorting a woman between them.

Squire Campbell, hat in hand, advanced to meet them.

"Miss . . . Miss Annie," he faltered.

Then that wonderful laugh of hers — and Benedetta had shaken herself free of her enchanted escort.

CHAPTER XX.

NOW there be beauty quiescent and listless — not that of the Countess — which purrs to itself drowsily and puts you to sleep in a well-furnished Nirvana; such is the beauty of our peaceful blondes; pay your calls with a hammock, a hymn-book, or a *gude* English novel, and stay six months — the length of a polar night. Then there is a frolicking, riotous, fulminating sort of beauty, dark as a storm cloud, and as lawless indeed, which runs, never walks, stands, never sits, and engages in pillow fights, sound sleep. — Such was Countess di Tòrrida, la Benedetta.

In the hammock, which Pete had bought, Benedetta looked like a scare-crow — lean, angular — and she knew it. Instead she had put Pup in the hammock and swung him high till he howled. But in that black cave, lit by yellow light and fantastically hung with moonshiners' long beards — where

bats incarnated shadows and echoes voiced your secret fears, where the crooking of a finger made a monster on the wall — there Benedetta was timely: queen of a realm.

Benedetta's was the beauty of motion, not that of repose. She was Æolus's own daughter, a princess of the winds. You only felt her strength when she whirled.— Strength is but another name for beauty. And her frock — white as the corolla of a Moon-flower, and as sensitive — wavered at her least movements, tortured and agitated, ready to leave her and flutter away. Let no blonde be flimsily attired.

She came frolicking into the circle of yellow light: *scherzando*.

“Now *do* let me shoot your gun!”

Pap let her.

Bang! . . . and ten thousand booming echoes.

Into Pap's arms fell Benedetta, feigning fright.

Every moonshiner offered her his gun.

Then riotous: *agitato*.

“What beards! . . . Fra Diavolo . . . And they are real!”

Benedetta tugged softly at a beard that was buttoned up in a coat — a beard, one yard long.

“Look at mine!” requested the chorus.

Fulminating: *a piacere*.

“Bowie-knives . . . bah! I can go you one better . . . ”

A whirl of the white corolla, two shapely black stamens disclosed . . .

And Benedetta had drawn her Italian stiletto.

“Try it on a hair of your beard,” she directed.

Respectfully they tested the razor-like blade, remembering from whence it had come.

“Don’t it pester you when you walk?”

“Naw,” said Benedetta, quick at learning foreign languages. “Naw, it’s on the off side.”

“Let’s see you put it back,” proposed Pete, innocent as a babe.

“Ain’t you got no manners!” cried the chorus.

“Pete, you’s powerful low-down!”

Pete realized he had gone down too low. He blushed red through tan freckles.

“Pete’s a . . . ‘powerful’ darling,” decided Benedetta, throwing her left arm about the boy’s neck.

He struggled with the grace of a captive calf; but she held to him. . . .

"Pete, ain't you got no manners?" swelled forth anew, the rich chorus.

Pete guessed not his crime. But he was doing something wrong. He resolutely stopped wriggling, straightened up rigid, and stood at attention — the picture of boyish despair — with Benedetta's left arm encircling his neck.

"You's powerful poor company," complained the chorus.

"Let Pete alone," ordered the Countess, waving her stiletto in her right hand, and with her left arm slowly drawing the boy toward her. "And I don't want you to blame Pete for showing me the way in here!"

Nobody blamed Pete, to judge by the bearded faces.

Pete was now very close, and still the entwining white arm kept pulling. . . .

"I want to be a moonshiner," Benedetta continued.

And Pete lost all idea of time, that of place alone drinking up his senses....

He was standing in front of her with bowed head, while she leaned on him and over him and around him — her arms about his neck and crossed over his breast, the fluff of her bodice drowning his shoulders, the waves of her corolla beating over his legs.... a drunken bee in an unknown flower.

"I'm going to be a moonshiner," she repeated, slowly waving her stiletto from a hand on Pete's breast. "Squire Campbell, administer your oath.... Pete said you had an oath."

The slowly waved stiletto resembled the end of the tail of a serpent which encompassed Pete — and humanity.

Pap turned pale.

"Madam," he observed, simply but academically, "think twice of what you do. In thus formally allying yourself with us, you incur the risk of being.... being...."

"Being considered a moonshiner," completed the Countess. "Yes, I know. I want to be a moon-

shiner. Administer the oath, and I'll tell you why."

"You incur the risk of being sent to the Penitentiary for ten years," continued Squire Campbell.

"Down with the Penitentiary, and death to revenue collectors," invoked Benedetta, slowly, as if she were making a statement. "I want to be a moonshiner — what's your oath? Pete said you had one."

Squire Campbell looked at his men, questioningly.

They voted in chorus:

"Take her in, Squire. She'll be one o' ourn."

"Who'll stand for Annie Clark?" asked Squire Campbell.

"Me!" shouted every one present, including Pete — only he murmured drowsily.

"Whom will you take, Miss Annie?" inquired Pap.

To the Countess's inquiring look, Squire Campbell explained that it was customary for an old member to vouch for the good faith of a candidate who wished to enter their order.

"You will swear in his blood and on his blood," continued Squire Campbell.

Benedetta shivered on Pete's shoulders.

"In case of bad faith, the man who vouched for the culprit is first. . . . first dealt with."

"Shot?" faltered the Countess.

"No, stabbed," returned Pap, reassuringly.

The Countess reflected a moment. But the look of uncertainty on her face gave way to an expression of such bitterness, that, had you seen it, you might have justified Mr. Tourne-Boule in calling the woman a tigress. She unloosed her arms and pushed Pete from her.

"So be it," she said, as much with her burning eyes as with her lips. "So be it. I need you. You need me — though you don't know it. We shall help one another. Squire Campbell, will you vouch for me?"

"With my life, Miss Annie. . . ."

Pap rolled up his sleeve.

"Here, take my knife," he explained, "and scratch my arm till it bleeds."

"But your big bowie-knife is dirty," remarked

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Benedetta. "It might make a sore. I'll use my stiletto — it never was used but once.

"There?" she questioned, delicately touching Pap's biceps with her index finger.

"There," replied Squire Campbell.

She drew the stiletto across the skin.... Pap's blood trickled half way to his elbow, then zigzagged, and dropped to the ground.

"What's the form of your oath?" she asked.

"What you have done," he replied. "Our oath consists of an act, not words. You are now one of us. I am your bond."

"Benissimo."

Then dallying with her stiletto as if it had been a wand, Benedetta proceeded to business:

"Pete said you were all worried about this man Norris buying up your farms...."

"That's what we is," assented a dozen voices.

"And you have cause to be worried," agreed the Countess.

"What'd we tell you, Squire!" inquired the amiable baritone, named Bill.

"Miss Annie, for Heaven's sake," interposed

Squire Campbell, "be careful how you stir up the passions of these men. They know only one way of getting rid of an enemy, and that is by assassination. They believe that Colonel Norris will destroy their stills, and drive them from the country...."

"That's precisely what he will do, if you let him," said the Countess.

"But, Miss Annie," remonstrated Squire Campbell, "do you know what you are doing? — you are signing Colonel Norris's death warrant!"

"No, I'm not," replied the Countess. "You men are too honest. You don't have to kill a man to get rid of him."

"How's you gwine to do it then?" innocently inquired one of the honest men.

"Why, kidnap his daughter, that's all," explained the Countess.

As the men looked at one another in amazement, Countess Benedetta di Tòrrida continued:

"That daughter of his is the cause of all your trouble. She is the one who is buying up your land. Colonel Norris wouldn't give a snap of his fingers

for your old farms. He had just as soon live in one place as another. It's his daughter — and if she carries out her plans, there'll be a street-car line from here to Louisville; and there will be so many folks down here that you can't turn around without stepping on the toes of a revenue collector."

"That's what she'll do," assented the honest men.

"Now you can't kill a woman," continued the Countess.

"Yes, we kin, protested the honest men.

"I'd like to see one of you try your hand on me," challenged the Countess.

"But you's all right," explained the honest men.

"Yes," rejoined the Countess of Tòrrida, grimly as before, "I'm all right...."

And carefully wiping her stiletto on the sleeve of Baritone Bill, she set about restoring the weapon to its sheath — on the under off side. The blade of the stiletto was long and narrow, its sheath consequently small.... The Countess might have been threading a needle — so steady was her hand. But the chorus quaked. The pearl handle and gold hilt made a cross on her stocking....

“Now, men,” she observed, straightening up, “that daughter of Colonel Norris has got to be here in this cave by to-morrow this time. We are tired of having town folks follow her around these woods!”

CHAPTER XXI.

WHILE the genius of the place and that of the Countess were being so admirably blended into a common force for the promotion of liberty and vengeance, the disparate elements of Colonel Norris's household were clashing discordantly. The accusations of Mr. Turnbull, and the counter charges of the Countess, suggested even more than had been insinuated. Each one feared for what he loved the most — love being the cause of fear.

Mr. Turnbull, with his quick wit, might have found a way of stilling the troubled waters, had it not been for Mr. Stone. But simple-minded people are amazing. The human brain has become so convoluted, and truthful simplicity has grown so rare, that we no longer count on anybody being natural or doing a perfectly rational thing. Now-a-days only lunatics and men of genius may be

simple. To which of these classes Mr. Stone belonged, will be established by the final outcome: a genius being a successful lunatic; a lunatic, a genius that has failed. At any rate, instead of elaborating a scheme of conquest — as Mr. Tourne-Boule expected — Timothy Stone merely resolved on giving up, and being done with Susan forever. Heroism deserted a hero. . . .

This state of things is not uncommon in everyday life, though quite rare in books. In books heroes are heroic from morning till night, in one way or another: they follow a principle, as a car does its trolley — up hill, down hill and into the tunnel. Mr. Stone should have emerged from the painful scene at Pap's house, burnt by ridicule, but purified. As it was, he came forth roasted — and swearing in the manner of an unregenerate Turk. Ugly men are more sensitive to ridicule than they pretend to be. Mr. Stone frightened every bat in his cave with vibrating diddlededees.

"I ain't much," he explained to them, "I know I ain't much, but women haven't any right to laugh at me!"

Then a Turkish chorus, and a new unhooking of bats' clawed wings.

"What are women?" asked Mr. Stone.

Nobody could tell him.

He resumed:

"What have they ever done for me — but laugh at me? Angels, are they! Then when I get to Heaven, Lord, deliver me: they'll snigger through their harps!"

Echoes sniggered.

"I've got a soul," explained Mr. Stone, "and a heart. I've got a whole lot o' feelings! *I* can love. . . . Why, *I* could love enough to suit a harem! I'm just as tender-hearted as I can be: I'd cry over 'em and love 'm and dance 'm on my knee, call 'em sweetness and all that sort of thing — I'd be one of the best husbands that ever lived in this world! But because I haven't got a pretty face, I've got to put up with being. . . . a. . . . "

And Pete's inelegant phrase suddenly coming to his mind, Mr. Stone completed:

"A. . . . damned dude's nigger!"

He kept on, to the disgust of the bats — who,

like the ladies, objected to an unhallowed, homely man:

"If you've got a title, they'll worship you; if you've got a million, they'll adore you; if you're handsome, they'll love you; if you're graceful, they'll let you walk with 'em; if you're like me.... join a circus!

"I'll tell you what you've got to have to get along with the ladies," reasoned Mr. Stone.

"You've got to have something they can show to their friends.... Something that can be seen a mile off, something that can't be doubted for a moment by the biggest fool that ever lived! Then they'll make up to you. But don't you go and ask a woman to take risks.... Don't ask her to love your big old generous sympathetic soul — even if it's as big as the universe: because she can't get a picture of your soul to frame, and hang up in the parlor!"

The bats hung head downward, sleepy, but listening.

"Every woman ought to be equipped with an X-ray apparatus," suggested Mr. Stone.

He was in a wretched state. Not many hours afterward he presented himself at Colonel Norris's gate and called out, wretchedly:

"Hello! Hello!"

This is the way you do in the rural districts of Kentucky: it is not safe to knock on a neighbor's door. You come to a halt at the outer gate, which, through gentle consideration for the public, is generally far enough away from the house to be out of gun-shot. There you hello, or rather "holler," until you have attracted the attention of the inmates. If they like your looks, they invite you in. If they mistrust you, they unchain the dog, and ascertain if the gun be loaded with No. 12 or buck-shot.

Mr. Stone was invited to enter, his appearance being quite ordinary. He wore the same clothes in which he had peeled potatoes. The collar of his flannel shirt was unbuttoned. His sleeves were rolled up. He carried a package, which, anybody could see, was a bundle of letters.

"Mr. Stone, I believe," observed Colonel Nor-

ris, curtly, without bowing, as the visitor was shown into the library.

"Yes, I'm a mushroom-grower," explained the sometime knight.

Colonel Norris did not have sufficient interest in mushrooms to invite the truckster to take a seat.

"I've got a package of your daughter's letters," continued Mr. Stone, exhibiting the bundle, as if the letters were so many packages of garden seed. Then he stopped to give the millionaire time to gasp:

"Susan. . . . my Susan's letters. . . ."

"Yes, Susan's letters."

"To whom?"

"To me."

While Colonel Norris sank into a chair, the grower of mushrooms expanded a breadth of chest that filled the big flannel shirt. Then in a vibrating baritone, which would have made the footlights of a theatre tremble:

"Turnbull gave me her New-York address. I wrote to her, and got to loving her. I signed Turnbull's name, as he suggested. She got to loving

me, because she thought I was Turnbull; but I am not. I'm Timothy Stone. I am *not* Tourne-Boule. Here are the letters. I'm sorry I wrote to her. Good day, sir...."

Mr. Stone had made, as he thought, all necessary explanation, and he was leaving. Colonel Norris thought differently. He sprang forward and seized Mr. Stone's arm.

"But, man," he cried, "you say she is in love with you?"

"No," returned Mr. Stone, "I didn't say anything of the kind. She's in love with Turnbull: he writes books, says poetry and has a brown beard...."

"Susan in love with Mr. Turnbull!"

"Yes. Take out some of those letters and look over them."

Colonel Norris obeyed as in a dream. The first letter he glanced at was sufficient proof.

"But Mr. Turnbull is engaged to Miss Wentmore!" exclaimed the wretched father.

"That's what they say," agreed Mr. Stone, stupidly; and he again said good-day.

He was on the threshold, when his eyes fell upon a jaunty little riding hat, which hung on a rack in the hall — hung balancing, moved by a sportive breeze.

He paused, fascinated....

The hat was beckoning to him, moved by the wind, bobbing and bowing.

Mr. Stone bobbed....

And the fluttering hat, impelled by Fate's blowing, leaped from its hook and flew straight to him.

He caught it....

No one was looking.

And he kissed it. Mr. Stone had "a whole lot o' feelings."

Then madness left him.

He tottered.... He had slain his love.

Back on the hook, her little hat; back in his heart, his old love.... dead!

He had killed his love, and he had cursed her. He had cursed woman. He had murdered love. Big had his love been, living; dead, its corpse stretched to the horizon — dead, mangled love, too big to bury!

He stole away as a murderer.

Colonel Norris remained in the library, his head between his hands. He reviewed the past — which is the way men reason when they are old. He questioned the past concerning the future....

Was Fate going to give him riches and hold back all the rest! Two daughters, the fairest of women — Julia and Susan.... Julia had already gone to ruin, breaking her mother's heart, wrecking three fortunes. And now Susan was beginning the same old story, by loving and allowing herself to be loved by another woman's acknowledged fiancé....

Why had they allowed her to begin this correspondence! Why had not Alvin....

But Doctor Alvin's name conjured up from the past equally heart-rending memories.

"Oh," cried the wretched millionaire, "it's Alvin! Alvin's curse is upon me! Alvin...."

By a strange coincidence, Doctor Alvin appeared in person at that moment on the threshold.

Colonel Norris shrunk back, as if at the appearance of a ghost.

Doctor Alvin seemed to be quite as agitated as Colonel Norris.

"Norris," he whispered, huskily.

"Alvin," whispered back the other.

And the two white-haired men seemed ready to flee from each other.

"You have surprised my secret," cried Doctor Alvin, his black eyes flashing out in marked contrast to his white hair. "You have found it out. What have you to say, Norris?"

Doctor Alvin stood in practically the same attitude as that assumed by Mr. Stone when admitting that Susan's letters had been written to him.

But Colonel Norris was pursuing the visions of his own agitated soul. He saw not, nor did he hear, save that which was clamoring from the past.

"Alvin," he murmured, "you loved Catherine. I married her. She was engaged to you before she knew me. I stole your love. I...."

Doctor Alvin sprang forward as if to catch Colonel Norris in his arms. Colonel Norris waved him back.

"How did you avenge this wrong? — by retali-

ating? — No. You gave the cloak also. After I had taken your sweetheart, you brought me your money. You cared for my invalid wife while I was an exile. You brought up my daughter when she was an orphan. Your whole life, Alvin, has been one long sacrifice of self. . . . ”

Tears came into Doctor Alvin's eyes. He made another effort to take Colonel Norris in his arms. Colonel Norris pushed him back.

“ But, Alvin, your sacrifice has not gone unnoticed. Fate is working out your vengeance. . . . ”

“ Reward,” cried Doctor Alvin, “ say *reward!* My years may be numbered, but those which remain will be so full of happiness that the past will be forgotten.”

Colonel Norris moaned as he guessed Doctor Alvin's meaning.

Doctor Alvin resumed :

“ Norris, if you knew how she has grown in my heart, stealing away my bitterness, filling the void which her mother left! She is Catherine to me. I call her Susan, but she is the old Catherine who used to love me. I see her young and beautiful

as her mother was. I forget my age. I too am young once more. My hair is black. Hers is blond.... Susan-Catherine! May I have your daughter, Norris?"

Colonel Norris could not utter a syllable.

Doctor Alvin continued:

"If you knew how hard it has been to live here at her side and never tell her of my love — to act out the part of a guardian when I was dying to tell her! But I have kept my faith. Susan has never heard a word of love from me or any other man. She is fancy-free. She is ignorant of love's existence. She intends to study art, believing art is all.... May I tell her to-morrow? May I tell her now?"

Doctor Alvin understood the gesture, which Colonel Norris made, as an assent. He hastily left the room.

Fate, however, reappeared on the threshold in the shape of Captain Malepeste. But French fate is diverting. French fate may even be gay. And Captain Malepeste, good Frenchman, burst in upon the

harrowing scene with the breeziness of his perennially vernal nation.

“My dear Colonel,” he exclaimed, “you wouldn’t believe it, but do you know that my withered old heart is putting out afresh?”

The jocular words fell like stones on the already crushed millionaire. Malepeste next. . . . Malepeste who had fought under him, saved his life on the field of battle, furnished him with capital in Australia, and devoted his life to Susan’s education. Malepeste’s withered old heart. . . .

Colonel Norris remembered the Frenchman’s sentimental Waterloo — Captain Malepeste had loved Gertrude, Captain Bisherig had married her.

Ah, these idle questions of sentiment which people made light of, and which yet were so momentous. . . . What was wealth, save a shrine which should inclose a sentiment! And your glory, what was it, unless worn by some woman as her diadem! Wealth and glory! — No. Love was what men desired. But love was hard to possess, harder than fame, more difficult than riches. If I were rich, perhaps I should be loved. If you were fam-

ous, you might be loved. Then strive day and night, you and I, heart-sick and lonely, that we may become rich and famous, and thereafter be loved. Love me — Alas, I know you will not; but you will love my castle, my lands, my dog.... my paper book, and that is better than not being loved at all. Men who make fortunes, and they who find fame, are only those whose hearts are hungriest.

Captain Malepeste resumed his metaphor:

“Yes, sir, putting out leaves and flowers a second time, and to judge by what Susan says, I’m going to gather some fruit this.... Indian summer.”

“What does Susan say?” Colonel Norris had just strength enough to ask.

“Why, Susan says she believes she loves me.”

Colonel Norris misunderstood the treacherous personal pronoun. He buried his face in his hands.

Captain Malepeste inquired:

“What’s the matter? I too have heard about that engagement between her and Turnbull, but I don’t believe a word of it. I don’t believe Turn-

bull cares a fig for her. You know what I believe?"

Colonel Norris knew not.

"I believe Turnbull is setting his cap for Susan. I overheard a few words which passed between them this morning. . . ."

"Who. . . . whom are you talking about?" faltered Colonel Norris.

"Why, man, didn't you know that I had been courting Lucile for two months?" asked Captain Malepeste, in an injured tone.

He continued:

"Didn't you know that we had hung up red corn with the same blue ribbon? Didn't you know that we were going to be married?"

At that moment a Fate which was not gay, but dark and terrible as a long-deferred hope cheated, stole wavering into the room like an upright shadow on a moon-haunted wall — and Doctor Alvin asked, huskily:

"Do you know where Susan is? She has disappeared. I have looked for her everywhere."

"Oh, she's out in the woods somewhere," re-

plied Captain Malepeste, petulantly, not relishing the interruption.

“No,” said Doctor Alvin, “Susan has been abducted!”

Back stole the shadow, crawling, crouching, clinging to the moon-haunted wall.—And this same shadow you will see on any love-lit night, if you but brush your mistress’s black tresses from your eyes. . . . Heed my warning: brush them not.

CHAPTER XXII.

SUSAN kidnapped!

Lucile wrung her hands. Gertrude wept. Catherine had fainted. Captain Bisherig spoke German. Captain Malepeste swore French. Doctor Alvin cleaned his rifle. Colonel Norris remained in a stupor. But Mr. Turnbull — Mr. Jean Jacques Tourne-Boule was a tempest, a tornado, a cyclone, and a whirlwind. In fine, he was lyrically disposed.

What Mr. Turnbull would do when he found Susan's abductors, what he was going to do, what they would see him do — if written out, had filled a volume twice the size of "Oak and Palm."

Mr. Turnbull borrowed a shotgun, procured a revolver, tried on a duelling sword, and asked Captain Malepeste if he didn't have a breastplate to spare.

"A what?" inquired Captain Malepeste.

"A breastplate, a *cuirasse*," explained Mr. Turnbull, "a coat of mail, such as the German Emperor is said to wear, which will preserve my life until I shall have rescued Susan."

Captain Malepeste was astounded.

But Lucile believed. Hysterically, she cried out.

"Oh, Jim, you're going to get killed!"

She sprang toward Mr. Turnbull.

He waved her back lyrically, saying, rhetorically:

"Woman, tempt me not. My duty is clear indeed. A guest, by chance, of this honored roof, I see my white-haired host villainously stricken by an unseen hand. Would you that I leave him in his tears?—No. Rather will I leave his perfidious assailant sweltering in his own blood. Death! What is death?—A victory to the brave, obloquy for the base. Death!—So be it, but fair Susan first. Malepeste, friend, load my gun."

"What are you going to do?" questioned Captain Malepeste, who, being something of a lyric artist himself, felt humiliated at Mr. Turnbull's expansive heroism.

"Scour the country," explained Mr. Tourne-

Boule, "find Susan, chastise her abductors, restore the weeping maid to her father's outstretched arms."

Now France is the only country in the world that produces boisterous bravery. Because a Frenchman cries out from the housetop all the heroic things he proposes to do, it does not necessarily follow that he is a coward. Sometimes he descends from the housetop, and literally does all that he promised to do. Captain Malepeste, knowing that this was true for France, was ready to admit the possibility of vociferous bravery in America. He, therefore, followed Mr. Turnbull from the room, and helped the man of letters to arm.

"So, friend Malepeste," observed Mr. Tourne-Boule, handling the gun as if it had been a golf stick, "when you want the thing to shoot, you pull here, do you not?"

Mr. Turnbull had his finger on the break-lever.

Captain Malepeste felt his faith in Mr. Turnbull waver.

"Still," he reflected, "the man's ignorance of fire-arms may be offset by his physical bravery.

Women sometimes seize a gun for the first time in their lives, and bring down a desperado."

Captain Malepeste, accordingly, explained to Mr. Tourne-Boule that the lever in question was for breaking the piece; that to fire it, he should first pull back the hammer, aim, then press upon the small tongue of iron underneath — familiarly known as the trigger.

"Of course! Of course!" agreed the man of letters. "Each style of gun has its own peculiar manipulation. My guns — and, oh! if I only had one of my trusty guns — My guns are quite different from this. . . ."

"What sort are yours?" asked Captain Malepeste.

"My guns are automatic," assured Mr. Tourne-Boule. "You touch the lever, as I indicated a moment ago, then there is a duplex action of the mechanism: the hammer flies back, sight is taken, the trigger pulled, bang! and your mortal enemy lies quivering in the throes of death, five hundred yards away."

Captain Malepeste now realised that France could not have produced Mr. Tourne-Boule.

“And to think that Lucile loves the inflated ass!” Captain Malepeste reasoned. “I’ve a good mind to tell him that this style of gun shoots through the stock, and that he should put the barrel to his shoulder or to. . . . to *quelque part*.”

Captain Malepeste smiled in French.

“Still,” he added, mentally, “the lion’s skin won’t stay on long. I’ll let him alone.”

But Captain Malepeste could not help somewhat imposing on the man of letters. He informed Mr. Tourne-Boule that a butcher knife was a genuine Kentucky bowie, and he allowed the poor novelist to gird on the most ominous looking weapon that was to be found in the kitchen.

“After you have discharged both barrels of your gun, and the five chambers of your revolver, you must then lay hands on your bowie if the enemy still lives,” explained Captain Malepeste.

Mr. Turnbull smiled complacently, as if he considered superfluous Captain Malepeste’s instructions.

In reality he was paying the closest attention.

“And now, Malepeste, friend, fare thee well,” announced Mr. Tourne-Boule.

As he shook Captain Malepeste’s hand, the lyricist whispered:

“Make Lucile happy!”

At this whispered injunction Captain Malepeste jumped, figuratively speaking, out of his skin.

He gasped:

“But I thought she was *your* sweetheart!”

Mr. Turnbull took on a look of pity and compassion, mingled with the ghost of love.

He said:

“In the olden time, when knights went forth to meet death face to face, they were wont, among other things, to confess their loves, that their courage might be quickened. . . . Friend Malepeste, love, which no man can measure, is now sending me forth into the shades of oncoming night—wild, turbulent love, which suffers, will suffer, and can forever suffer but still love on. Malepeste, I love this yellow-haired ward of yours, the angel whom you call Susanne. I love her. When first she

looked at me, all the past loves of my life were blotted from my soul — and they were many. She swept my heart of every souvenir. She alone remains, glorious queen of all my obedient talents, filling every cranny of my bursting heart, and taxing to its utmost what, I am proud for her, is a capacious soul. . . . Would I do right, should I be chivalrous, if I concealed my passion for seraphic Susan, and pretended still to love Lucile? Answer, Malepeste, man of Gallic *honneur*, would I do right, should I be princely? ”

“ So you don’t love Lucile? ” questioned Captain Malepeste, finding it hard to see the woods on account of the trees.

“ I do not love Lucile,” repeated Mr. Turnbull. “ Susan is all I love. If I die, tell Susan that I died bleeding forth her name liquidly from my heart.”

Mr. Tourne-Boule had stepped out into the early shadows of evening — and disappeared.

Captain Malepeste remained for quite a minute just as Mr. Turnbull had left him — his mouth open, as if to speak; his hand extended, as if to grasp; a foot advanced, as if to run. And he might have

been standing there yet, had he not been startled from his revery by a low moan, in an adjacent hall, and then by the sound of something falling to the floor.

Stepping out into the hall, Captain Malepeste saw Lucile lying in a heap. He caught her up. Then remembering Mr. Turnbull's recommendation—that he should make Lucile happy — Captain Malepeste dared to kiss Lucile. Whether the desired effect was produced on Lucile, is not manifest; but the kiss made Captain Malepeste happy. He snatched another, became happier still, then like all drunkards, whether of love or alcohol, he repeated the potion and went after it again, until the operation — like Mr. Tourne-Boule's famous gun — became automatic, rapid-firing, and self-aiming....

Joy!

The mechanism became duplex.... Lucile had never before been kissed — broadside. It had brought her to from a fainting spell. She positively could not help returning her enemy's fire.

“Nom d'une pipe.... and you love me?”

"I don't love you as much as you love me," honestly confessed Lucile.

"You can't," explained Captain Malepeste.

"No, Maly, that's the truth; I can't," declared Lucile. "And I want you to know it before we're married. I was out there in the hall, and heard all that Jim.... Mr. Turnbull said. I.... I loved him. I knew he didn't love me, as.... as a man ought to love a woman who is going to be his wife; but it nearly killed me all the same to hear him say so. I'll get over it.... I hope, and I'll love you more than I ever loved.... him; but you'll have to give me a little time ——"

And to the forlorn expression on Captain Malepeste's face, which surged up at the mention of "a little time," Miss Wentmore hastened to explain:

"Oh, not so long! Nobody could keep from adoring you more than a...."

Captain Malepeste caught her face between his hands and kissed her.

"Than.... a month," sputtered Lucile.

Once more, brave Malepeste.

"Than.... a week," sighed Lucile.

Third shot from the Captain, and the fair enemy's colors went up.

"A day," murmured Lucile; "an hour. . . ."

And twining her fingers in his beard and hair, she whispered, contentedly, her dear loving little heart full at last:

"Nor a minute nor a second. Maly, I adore you now, and I'll adore you always."

Meanwhile Mr. Turnbull was striding into the night toward Pap's humble abode, and the remainder of Colonel Norris's household was growing more and more frantic at Susan's disappearance.

It was love and war. Old warriors, remember ye — and smile.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. TURNBULL strode, chanting victory to his soul: for this is the strength and this is the weakness of artistic temperaments — they see what does not exist, and they see so vividly that they are sure it exists, though it does not, has not, and never will exist — that which they see. The book or two, and the canvas or so, along with this statue and an opera, are but random feathers dropped to earth in their hurried flight across the sky. As compared with what artists do and live and suffer in their own self-constructed world, their works are but the land murmur of a distant storm at sea.

Mr. Turnbull was living, for the time being, a glorious victory, which was born of his fantasy. He suspected that the Countess was at the bottom of Susan's abduction — though he had been careful not to share his suspicion with anyone. He felt equally sure of his power over the Countess. All that he

had to do, therefore, was to rescue Susan theatrically, restore her to her home dramatically, wed her romantically, and thereafter be rich evermore....

Tickets, please!

Why, certainly. Tickets by land and tickets by sea, promenade decks and a private bath, parlor cars, and the balcony room....

"No," said Mr. Tourne-Boule, to the night, "I'll buy a yacht and own my car, possess a caravansary of my own, and strangle a New-York publisher once a month...."

Mr. Tourne-Boule was always strangling publishers in his dreams. He included dungeons in all his air castles, wherein languished many publishers, and all from New York. He saw their well-fed faces turning black. He heard them moaning for pity.

As he entered Pap's gate, Mr. Tourne-Boule was dealing with an accredited friend of Twenty-third Street, who had a pungent, but effective way of shaping rough-hewn scribblers. And the luckless publisher's gurgling had become a death rattle, when

a sound which was decidedly more distinct and quite as ominous, smote Mr. Turnbull's ear.

It was a snarling growl, which suggested dog teeth as long as the claws of a bear.

But Mr. Turnbull was worked up to the point of heroism. He pulled back both hammers of his gun — as Captain Malepeste had instructed; and when the dog sprang at him, he pulled both triggers. The hills sang the echo. . . .

Pup was dying — and I loved Pup.

Mr. Turnbull also remembered Captain Malepeste's other instructions. Accordingly he emptied the five chambers of his revolver into Pup's quivering form. After which he began to wield his butcher knife with gurgling effect. . . .

Stick, stab, hair and blood!

Mr. Turnbull was carving when Pete arrived.

And Pete arrived like a catamount, a catapult — a catapasm: for after he had flung himself on Mr. Turnbull's back, Pete clung to him like a plaster. . . .

Mr. Turnbull tried to loosen the boy's arms about his neck. He could not. He tried to free himself

from Pete's entwining legs. Nor did he succeed....

They rolled over, stood up, and fell down. Pete stuck like a leech, and his arms kept tightening on Mr. Turnbull's throat....

Pete was doing for Mr. Tourne-Boule what the man of letters had reserved for the amiable amputator of Twenty-third Street.

For an instant Mr. Turnbull's breath was shut off entirely.... He made a frantic lurch backward with his head, catching Pete squarely on the chin. The blow stunned Pete, and caused him to loose his hold. But an idea came with the blow — as many great ideas do.

Of his hands Pete fashioned a trombone, like that Pap had made in the cave; and he blew the same strange blast. With this, he leaped again on the panting man of letters. But he did not have to hold him long....

The dogs arrived first. They formed in a circle about Pup's carcass. And they emitted, every one of them, that long-drawn-out meaning howl of whining canine anguish — which, if it could be im-

itated instrumentally, might serve as theme for a funeral dirge. The baying of the dogs quickened the men's steps. Their approach was as noiseless as that of the dogs.

The first thing that Mr. Turnbull heard, was the clicking of a dozen or more rifles; and though he did not know what it was, the sound chilled his blood. There is something peculiarly suggestive in the clicking of a gun lock at night, when you can see neither the gun nor the person holding it.

Pete realised the danger of the situation. He cried out:

"Don't shoot, Pap, or you'll hit me."

"What you got, Pete?" inquired a voice from the darkness, which Mr. Turnbull concluded was that of Pap.

"A dam' skunk," replied Pete.

"Let him loose, an' git off on one side," directed the voice of the invisible speaker.

Mr. Turnbull earnestly objected to Pete turning him loose there in the dark; they would shoot him....

Mr. Turnbull clung to Pete. Pete was his buckler.

But if Mr. Turnbull found it hard to get away from Pete, when Pete was holding him, he soon learned that holding Pete was a still more difficult problem. . . .

Pete squirmed like an eel. He scratched like a cat. He bit like a dog. He butted like a goat. And he kicked like a mule. . . .

Mr. Turnbull, realising that he would be unable to shield himself with Pete's body, gave up the fight; and he made known his despair, in a series of wild shrieks. . . .

"Help!" he demanded.

"Murder!" he cried out.

"They are killing me!" he asserted.

Mr. Turnbull was sure they were killing him, as they gagged him. They were quartering him, he thought, as they tied his hands and feet. When one of them tossed him like a bundle of soiled clothes into the circle of dogs which were standing guard about Pup's carcass, Mr. Turnbull concluded that he had reached the lowest zone of Hell. . . .

What was that slimy object beneath him!

Pup's carcass.

He tried to wriggle, but he only wallowed — in Pup's blood. The dogs came to lick him of Pup's blood. They fought over him, as they licked his face. He breathed their hot, fetid breath. They trampled on his throat....

And during all this martyrdom Mr. Turnbull heard the invisible band of demons carelessly discussing his fate.

"I'm for doing him up right now," voted one, "'cause if he went and killed Pup like that ther', it was 'cause he knowed much as we knows."

"I'm for savin' him till we ketch his pals," proposed another; "'cause he ain't done come here by hisself."

"But I tell you," protested a voice, which Mr. Turnbull recognized as Pap's, "he ain't after us, he's after her."

"Don't make nair bit of difference," reasoned horribly the first voice. "He knows mor'n's healthy for him to know."

"That's so," admitted Pap, quite as horribly.

"An' he's done killed Pup," cried Pete.

"That's so," admitted Pap, anew.

"An' he'd a killed me if he could," continued Pete.

"I spec' he would," agreed Pap, philosophically.

"Let's take him to her, and see what she says," proposed a gallant demon.

"She's done gone to bed," explained Pap.

"But she'd sorter feel slighted if we didn't," reasoned the chivalrous shade.

"I spec' she would," agreed Pap; "'cause she don't like this her' skunk any more'n we do."

Mr. Turnbull's remaining senses reeled. *She* meant the Countess. And while a demon named "Bill" and a devil named "Buck" were "toating" him like a sack — somewhere downward to a place whence the stars had fled, Mr. Turnbull mentally retraced his past life with the Countess — and he shuddered.

"She'll add torture to death!" reflected the unhappy man of letters. He grovelled on the dry floor of the cave, where they had dropped him. When

they lit the torch, its sputtering light, blinding him at first, added new horror to his soul. . . .

Twelve men and a boy stood about him. They wore greasy black masks over their faces. Butts of pistols protruded from hip pockets. Rifles leaned against the wall of the cave; while near the sputtering torch lay Pup, still bleeding in the presence of his murderer, his long tongue coated now with yellow dust, his yellow eyes bleared black with clot-
ted blood. . . .

Dead, murdered animals may present an aspect quite as sickening as that of butchered men.

When the Countess came tripping boldly among these bold men, clad only in a thin white gauzy floating thing, she stopped and started back in horror at the sight of Pup's mangled carcass. She came near wrenching from her face a black silk mask, as if thinking that it begot the spectre of the murdered dog. Then she desisted, exclaiming:

"Coward. . . ."

And Mr. Tourne-Boule saw Tòrrida's long stil-
etto waving snake-like in Benedetta's hand.

"Coward. . . ." she hissed, as she bent over

him. "It's like your other acts. You betray helpless women. You butcher dumb beasts."

Thirteen murmurs expressed approbation of her sentiments.

"Aren't you...."

But Benedetta's scorn changed to mocking laughter as she surveyed Mr. Tourne-Boule's plight....

His hat was gone, his clothes torn, his dog-licked face begrimed with dirt and dog's blood, his once pointed beard a tangled travesty; while his dim eyes spoke wretched cowardice.

"Why, Jimmy Jacquot," she cried, "what on earth is the matter? Have you soiled your hands? Have they rumped your hair? And where's your sweet pointed brown beard?"

She added, ominously:

"So you have been playing the hero, and trying to rescue your first and only true love!"

Mr. Turnbull wriggled as if he were trying to protest.

"You want to talk, Jimmy Jacquot?" inquired

the Countess, as of a parrot. "All right, there you are, let's have your tenor. . . ."

Inserting the blade of her stiletto between his pale cheek and the bandage that gagged him, the Countess cut the cloth with an ease which made patent her dagger's sharpness.

"Annie. . . . An. . . . Annie. . . ."

Mr. Turnbull lay on his back, tied hand and foot, and sobbing like a child:

"Annie. . . . my Annie. . . ."

The ghost of a flush on Benedetta's face, and thirteen murmurs of disapprobation.

The flush died away. She mocked him, saying:

"Su. . . . Susan. . . . my Susan. . . ."

But Mr. Turnbull had seen the flush.

"Annie," he cried, "I came after you, I swear it; I heard you were kidnapped."

"Indeed?" said the Countess, "how kind of you! I thought you were looking for Susan."

"Whom are you talking about? What Susan?" contemptuously inquired Mr. Turnbull, trying to sit up.

"Why, I thought you knew Susan," explained Benedetta.

Then as a sudden idea came to her, she danced fairylike in her gauzy floating garment to where Squire Campbell stood watching the scene in silence. She placed her hands on his shoulder. She whispered something in his ear. And almost immediately, Mr. Turnbull thought, the torch went out. Almost as quickly it was lighted again; and there within twenty feet of him, standing between two haggish women, was Miss Susan Norris.

"Don't you know her?" questioned the Countess, of Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Turnbull rubbed his eyes.... He saw yellow hair that showered everywhere. He saw black eyes which weeping had made blacker still. He saw a bosom that heaved, hands that clinched, and a face which cried deliverance. But back of all these lay Pup's cadaver, a stack of rifles, and a row of pistol butts. Mr. Turnbull hesitated only an instant. Then he replied:

"I've seen the young woman somewhere.... who is she?"

The Countess bent down and cut the bonds which tied his hands and feet.

"Go a little nearer," she advised, "and look at her well. See if you can't remember her. She says you told her day-before-yesterday that you loved her."

Mr. Turnbull seemed to regain his old self on regaining his feet.

"Why, it's that Norris girl!" he exclaimed, almost gaily, as he drew near Susan. "Annie, do you suppose for a moment that this...."

Mr. Turnbull hesitated. He was dealing with a tigress. He must, therefore, descend to the level of a brute. He resumed:

"Annie, do you suppose that this.... this fat creature of the pasture could dislodge your fairy image from my soul?"

And Mr. Turnbull was looking contemptuously at Susan, as a poet might look at a cow, when a funny thing happened....

One of Miss Norris's hands, moulded into a small but hard little fist, shot out suddenly — so quickly that it was scarcely visible; and it caught Mr.

Tourne-Boule on his contemptuously elevated chin.

The blow would not have felled a moonshiner, but Mr. Turnbull collapsed like a house of cards.

Thirteen mighty hurrahs stirred up thirteen thousand echoes, and the bats — a ghostly counterpart of cave echoes. Pete danced for joy.

“God A’mighty!” remarked the amiable baritone, named Bill, “I’d hate to tussle with her daddy.”

But Benedetta — oh! the strangeness of woman — was purple with anger before the thirteen shouts of approbation had died away. Her first act was to fall, rather than kneel, by the side of Mr. Turnbull, and to kiss him tenderly. Then rising to her feet, she sprang at Susan, the Italian dagger in her hand, an Italian oath upon her lips. . . .

A melee followed, but a short one. In their scramble to separate the two women, one of the honest moonshiners tripped and fell against the torch, extinguishing it. A few minutes elapsed before the torch could be relighted. When it did begin to sputter forth its black smoke and yellow light, they found the Countess holding on for dear life to one

of the haggish old women, thinking it was Susan. Susan had vanished. With Susan had disappeared Pap's repeating rifle, which had been leaning against the wall of the cave.

"She has carried off my stiletto, too," observed the Countess, to Mr. Turnbull.

The man of letters had now risen to a sitting posture.

Turning to the moonshiners, the Countess screamed:

"How long are you numskulls going to wait before starting after her?"

The numskulls were looking wonderingly at one another, with horror depicted on their faces.

The Countess stamped her foot in rage.

Squire Campbell explained:

"Madam, this is the third largest cave in the world. There's not one chance in a thousand that we will ever find the young woman... until her body begins to decay. Then the dogs will find her. The cave is too dry for them to follow an ordinary trail."

"*Meno male*," remarked the Countess.

But the moonshiners looked upon the matter in a different light. However red-handed a criminal may be, there is always, to his mind, a manner in which death should not be meted out. These Kentucky outlaws, who if the occasion had arisen would have shot a man through the heart as carelessly as they would have taken a chew of tobacco, shuddered at the mere thought of a human being groping lightless through their cave, until starvation and hungry bats might come to end the anguish. As children they had listened to such stories. To their thinking there was nothing in all the world so horrible as to be lost in the cave.

Mr. Turnbull had not listened to these stories as a child, but his boundless imagination made up the deficiency. He agreed with the moonshiners.

"Annie," he moaned, piously, "if God so wills, we'll take the next train for New York. . . ."

Then a remnant of his old smile, and a gleam of his genius:

"Tickets, please."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN the meantime, not more than half a mile away, in a different part of the cave, there was being enacted a scene quite different, though correlated with the one we have just witnessed.

Mr. Timothy Stone was picking mushrooms for all he was worth. Mr. Stone was worth only mushrooms.

Dead was his love, and hope was dead; only work remained — Labor, the last of all the gods to which men turn.

“Unlucky in love, lucky in mushrooms,” he soliloquized, as he plucked the delicately shaded buttons from their beds of manure, and tossed them into a basket.

He added:

“Lord, I’m tired; but this order has got to leave on the morning train. It will net me a cool hundred.”

Mr. Stone had worked all day, and he was now working all night.

By a remarkable coincidence, every mushroom bed in the cave had suddenly begun to send forth buttons on the evening after he had delivered Susan's letters to her father.

This is the way with mushrooms: you plant your spawn, then wait. You may wait for a week, a month, sometimes three months. You retire, with not a single button on the grizzly landscape of your subterranean garden. The next morning you find a copious harvest awaiting you. Mushrooms are like love: they come without warning, attain perfection instantaneously, and fetch a high price. They are bedded in manure.

Mr. Timothy Stone was picking mushrooms for all he was worth. He was worth not love, nor woman's companionship. He was worth only mushrooms.

As he emptied a basket of the fungi into a nearly filled box, which stood under his lamp, Mr. Stone's ear caught a sound that did not seem to have been occasioned by the flutter of a bat's dusty wing.

"Is that you, Pete?" he called out to the darkness.

He added:

"If it is, I wish to goodness, you'd come here and help me pick a few buttons. I'm almost dead, and this order has got to leave on the morning train.... That nigger will be here with his wagon in a couple of hours."

The voice was not Pete's, and what it said was strange:

"Throw up your hands, or I'll blow your brains out."

The voice, though apparently muffled, was quite clear. Its purport was clearer still. Looking in the direction of the voice, Mr. Stone saw close by the side of a gigantic stalactite, a diminutive black circle, with a human finger beneath and a human eye above.

"That's the cross section of a rifle, I'm looking into," concluded Mr. Stone.

He raised his hands, saying:

"Well, brother, you won't get much: raw mushrooms and a worn-out typewriter."

"Light that candle," commanded the muffled voice, alluding to a candle that lay near the typewriter. "And if I see your hands go near your pockets, I'll pull the trigger."

"How do you expect me to get a match from my pocket if I don't go after it with my hand," inquired Mr. Stone.

"Light the candle from the lamp," exhorted the muffled voice.

"What next?" asked Mr. Stone, obeying.

"Go straight to the mouth of the cave, and if you turn your head to look back one single time, you're a dead man."

"Ugh," growled Mr. Stone, pleasantly, "Sort of Lot's-wife procedure!"

He added, but without turning his head:

"Say, partner, I've got a queer sort of buckeye in my pocket. . . ."

"Move on!" commanded the muffled voice.

Mr. Stone moved off, sullenly reflecting that his wonderful buckeye was a mockery. He heard the person follow him.

"Damn it all," he meditated, "here I've been

working for nearly forty-eight hours, getting my order ready for this morning, and that blessed scamp back there is going to make me miss my train. . . . ”

“ Say, Mr. Man,” complained the truckster, but without turning his head, “ I promised to ship six cases of mushrooms to New York on the morning train. If I don’t do it, my credit will be ruined. Would you mind my taking the wheelbarrow and hauling the boxes along with us to the mouth of the cave? — There will be a nigger out there after while, and he’ll take the mushrooms to the station in his wagon. . . . ”

“ Hold your candle higher so I can see, and keep moving,” said the muffled voice.

Mr. Stone was now thoroughly angry. The bigger and stronger a man is physically, the slower he is to anger. Nature has made this wise provision. Mr. Stone should not have become angry so quickly : because he was as strong as Hephæstus, the Vulcan of the Greeks. But things had been worrying Mr. Stone for some time past. Susan had not materialized to suit him. Then he had had but little sleep for three days.

"I'll fix him," he resolved, referring to the blessed scamp. "He thinks he's going to parade me around like a bull, with my nose tied to my tail...."

Calculating by ear the distance which separated him from the blessed scamp, Mr. Stone waited until they had passed beyond the zone of lamp-light; then suddenly extinguishing his candle, he leaped to one side....

None too soon.

The scamp's rifle crashed almost simultaneously with the going-out of the candle. Mr. Stone felt the bullet fan his cheek, then he heard it smash, flattening, on the rocky wall.

"Quick shooting!" reflected Mr. Timothy Stone.

He jumped again, but this time straight at the spot where the rifle had flashed.

"Now, my good fellow," remarked Mr. Stone, as his mighty arms clasped the blessed scamp, "it's your time to squeal. Drop that gun, or in go your ribs.... you hear 'em crack?"

Mr. Stone's long, hard arms tightened with the grip of a bear. The rifle fell rattling to the floor.

"Hello! . . . " cried Mr. Stone, feeling the thing in the dark, "so you had a knife too. . . . Drop it!"

He tightened again until he heard the knife fall.

"Now those two hands. . . . " he admonished, jerking both the scamp's hands behind the back, and clasping them in one of his.

"And now. . . . " continued Mr. Stone, raising the scamp's arms until the latter was forced to bend forward at an angle of forty-five degrees, "get a move on you! I'm going to make you pick mushrooms from now till morning, so help me God! My order will leave on the early train. . . . "

Biff! Biff!

Mr. Stone cuffed the scamp generously, by way of admonition, first on one ear and then on the other.

"Wait till I pick up our gun," he explained, as the scamp showed signs of alacrity.

Mr. Stone headed his prisoner back through the dark passage which he knew by heart.

The scamp did not emit a sound, but staggered forward — bent over by the upward pressure which Mr. Stone exercised on the back-clasped hands —

staggered over stones, tottered and staggered, bent lower and lower, staggered wilder and wilder, reeled finally into the circle of light, then fell helplessly, a sobbing helpless fainting woman....

Mr. Stone could make out a skirt, by the dim light from the distant lamp.

"I'll be damned!" he declared, as he mopped his brow.

Then tucking her under his arm, he carried her to the lamp....

Black-circled eyes that were closed, dust-begrimed cheeks that were pale, God-given hair that was yellow still....

"Oh, my little Susan!" cried Mr. Stone, wild with fright, "what are you doing here?"

Almost he whimpered:

"Sister of my soul!.... and I cracked your ribs!.... what *are* you doing here?.... oh, Lord! And I cuffed my baby!"

Mr. Stone was in a predicament far worse than that of Miss Norris.

Conceive, if you can, of mistaking your soul's sister for a burglar in the dark: you crack her ribs,

you box her ears, you twist her arms, and sprain her back. . . . then *fiat lux!*

"Susan, black-eyed Susan, blond Susanne, dimpled Suschen, sister-soul, darling, angel, Susy child, Sue, Baby Suse. . . . "

Mr. Stone's mind being too disturbed to think, he did what the delirious do — he only remembered. He recalled the letters which he had written to Susan, and placed in the wood-pecker's hole. In his delirium, he recited these letters, ending each one with a "Sue, baby Suse."

Miss Norris had not entirely fainted. One of her reasons for tumbling in a heap on the ground, was to recover her strength, that she might make another effort to escape. She had believed that Mr. Stone was in connivance with the other inhabitants of the cave. Accidentally finding her way to his mushroom-beds, and coming upon him alone, Susan had resolved upon the desperate plan of forcing Mr. Stone, at the muzzle of her rifle, to show her the way out of the cave, despairing of being able to find it unaided.

The first outburst of affection on the part of Mr.

Stone, and the strange war dance he was executing about her, froze the blood in Miss Norris's veins. There are things more repulsive to a woman than being lost in a cave, starved to death, and eaten of bats. Susan repented of not having allowed the Countess to bury the Italian dagger in her breast. Mr. Stone resembled a cannibal as he danced, and a right hungry cannibal at that — amorously speaking. But when Mr. Stone began reciting her letters by heart — letters which had been written to her, and which still made her heart throb — Susan's apprehensions changed to amazement. Then that epithet of "baby," which Mr. Stone insisted on applying to her, tended to allay Miss Norris's suspicions. A hungry cannibal would hardly call for veal. Babies were poor little helpless things whose innate meanness you forgave, because of their chubby ignorance — peculiarly appropriate to Eve's descendants. If she was a baby, then Mr. Stone was not an ogre. . . .

And while he kept on with his war dance and his tender declamation, Susan admired Mr. Stone's broad expanse of chest, against which she had been

almost crushed, his mighty arms, which had done the crushing, his kindly eyes. . . . and then his thin, but flaming red, red hair.

Red hair. . . . no beard. . . . six feet. . . . two hundred pounds. . . .

These data, coupled with the letters, which the cannibal seemed to know by heart, produced a tingling sensation in the heart of Miss Norris.

Who was the man!

His name was Stone, she knew full well.

But who was he!

She was on the point of demanding an explanation, when the big cannibal suddenly reeled in his war dance, and nearly fell. His face turned white. She saw him feel his left arm, then smile feebly. . . . That seraphic smile — New tingling in her soul!

Where had she seen and felt that smile before?

Miss Norris remembered: it was when Icarus had come near killing a man at the spring. The man had been brave, she remembered.

“What’s the matter?” she asked of Mr. Stone, quite naturally.

"I'm cut.... and I didn't know it.... I've lost a lot of blood.... I.... I feel faint."

But Mr. Stone smiled on.

"Cut! Who cut you?"

"You did.... with that long knife.... when... when I jumped at you in the dark."

Mr. Stone still smiled.

Susan sprang to her feet.

"I didn't know I cut you.... where's the wound?"

"Here.... It's only a scratch, but it's bleeding like forty."

Susan had pushed up his sleeve. A splash of Mr. Stone's red blood fell on her hand.

"An artery has been cut.... do you see how it's spouting?"

"Yes, I see," replied Mr. Stone, feebly, looking at Susan's yellow hair.

"Sit down.... lie down. You ought not to stand. I'll fix you: I'm a doctor. Have you any brandy in the house?"

"This is a cave," replied Mr. Stone, flat on

his back, "A cave.... nothing but mushrooms and...."

"But you're bleeding to death.... I haven't any scissors, knife, or anything! I can't tear your heavy flannel shirt, and I must have a bandage of some kind, quick...."

"Let me die!" proposed Mr. Stone, sleepily, but cheerfully. "Let me die! This is the happiest moment I'll ever know."

"Extreme weakness.... due to loss of blood," declared Susan, as if making a diagnosis.

"Don't leave me, for God's sake," prayed Mr. Stone, as he saw Susan moving away. "I can't die right, if you leave me.... It looks to me as if you ought to...., feel my pulse. Doctors feel folks's pulses when they're dying."

Susan's reply was a tearing sound. She emerged from behind a friendly stalactite, bringing several yards of white goods. The delicate fabric tore readily. She had prepared her bandages in a jiffy. She was kneeling beside him. She had bandaged his arm.

"Don't try to raise your head. You'll be all

right in a few minutes. I've stopped the flow of blood. But don't move until I tell you."

Mr. Stone insisted on raising his head — to kiss the bandage which she had placed about his arm.

Miss Norris pretended not to see.

"The least movement," she explained, "accelerates the action of the heart."

Mr. Stone was not interested in physiology. He observed:

"I've got your garter over there on that drain pipe."

Susan pretended not to hear, though Mr. Stone's statement made her gasp. She stammered:

"The blood in your lungs will have to go to take the place of what you have lost. . . ."

"Go over there and get it," requested Mr. Stone.

Miss Norris perceived that further evasion was useless. Still she hesitated, questioning:

"Get what. . . . the drain pipe?"

"If you like," replied Mr. Stone, closing his eyes, "but I want to give it back to you before. . . . before you leave. It saved my life once."

"The drain pipe?"

"If you like. I wore it as a hat band, in your yard, one night. Doctor What's-his-name shot at me. His bullet hit the buckle.... mashed it all up.... better go and get it."

"Where.... where is it — the buckle?"

"Right over there — all of you — other side of the mushroom box. I made you from the measurements on the back of the photograph: bucket is the head; plank, the waist; scantling's arms, bushel measure.... drain pipe...."

Miss Norris was behind the mushroom box, bending over her prostrate statue....

There was a low stool near the statue. A half-finished cigar lay on the stool. Much tobacco ash was thereabout, as if this had been the place where Mr. Stone smoked oftenest. Driven into the ground, near the head of the statue, was something which resembled a diminutive signboard — half of an old broom handle, with a piece of cigar box nailed to the end. Susan saw some roughly carved letters, which were hard to distinguish by the dim light. She bent lower and lower, as she scanned the letters. She was on her knees. Slowly she

spelled out the inscription: THE VENVS
OF CADIZ.

Miss Norris smiled. She removed the carved piece of cigar box from the broom handle. She also took the silk elastic from the cold unfeeling drain pipe. Whereupon she busied herself in a womanly way.

"Find it?" queried Mr. Stone, when Miss Norris had returned.

"Yes."

"Where is it?"

"What?"

"The.... buckle."

"I have it on.... But you'd better try to sleep a little. You'll feel all right when you awake."

"You promise me?"

"Promise what?"

"That.... that I'll be all right when I wake up."

"Yes."

"That.... that you'll be by me when I wake up?"

"Yes, go to sleep."

"I'm.... a.... sleep."

And he was. He had fainted.

Hephæstus having fainted, Aphrodite wept.

CHAPTER XXV.

IF their emotional temperaments permitted Lucile and Captain Malepeste to forget an instant the calamity which brooded over the farmhouse, this same temperament caused them to suffer all the more intensely when they remembered. Lay yourself down with a sorrow to sleep, dream of happiness, then awake to find sorrow perching on the foot of your bed — this is what they had done.

“And Susan!” exclaimed Lucile.

They had retired, figuratively, lamenting Susan. They had dreamed of their own sweet love. They awoke....

“And Susan!” cried Captain Malepeste.

The way to feel is never to feel anything long. Feel this, feel that, then feel something else. Sip only. Draughts long drawn out benumb the senses. Snatch kisses at a funeral, if you can. The dead will never care. Laugh a prayer to God, and it

may be heard. Who knows? — God may be gay. Then drop a tear into your emptied glass, push back your plate — Good-night.

Locked in each other's arms, Lucile and Captain Malepeste began to sob bitterly. It was their first bereavement, shared in common — the first mingling of their tears. With their arms about each other they went sobbing to find the other members of the family. Lucile's nose was red. Captain Malepeste's beard was wet.

It was past midnight. Answers to Colonel Norris's telegram had begun to come in. . . .

Three detectives had left Louisville, on their way to the farm; two would come from Chicago on the next train, one from New York. The announcement of a reward of fifty thousand dollars for missing Susan, had been flashed to every detective agency in the country.

As Lucile and Captain Malepeste entered the library, some one knocked at the front door.

"Another telegram," observed Colonel Norris.

But it was Pap. And to judge by his stammering, Squire Campbell was painfully sober.

"Kur.... Kur.... Colonel Norris," exclaimed Pap, evidently laboring under great excitement, "has.... has.... has your daughter lllllleft home?"

Squire Campbell's excitement was instantly communicated to every occupant of the room.

"Have you seen her?" they cried.

"Nnnnnaw!" responded Pap, with difficulty, "but my Pe.... Pe.... my Pe.... Pe.... my Pete seed her."

"Where?"

"In.... in.... in the cave. An'.... an'.... an' she's lost. An'.... an'.... an' she's gone crazy."

"!!!"

"Pepepete thought she.... she was.... was a ghost, she.... she.... she done.... she done carried on so. She.... she.... she 'lowed a.... a.... a woman in.... in white wanted.... wa.... wanted to.... to kill her with a dirk. An'.... an'.... an' she done.... done.... run so far back.... back.... back in the cave, I.... I I don't believe you ever.... ev.... ev.... ever

will find her. An'.... an'.... she'll starve to death.... to.... death, an'..... an'.... an' the bats will eat her — aw my Gawd!”

Pap's “aw my Gawd” went straight from his heart and found an echo in the heart of every one present.

Being lost in the cave was worse than being kidnapped. The look on Colonel Norris's face indicated complete despair.

“If.... if.... if you wants me.... Kur.... Kur.... Colonel, I'll git.... I'll git all my neighbors in.... in.... in a posse; an'.... an' we'll hope you.... hope you look for her in.... in.... in the cave.”

A gesture from Colonel Norris accepted the offer.

Pap retired. In a remarkably short time he returned with a posse of awed neighbors.

“We'd just as well start out lookin' for her now as in the daytime,” explained one of the neighbors, whose voice sounded strangely like that of the baritone, named Bill. “It's always dark in that ther' cave.”

"But we's got to have a mighty heap of candles," asserted a neighbor, who resembled Buck.

There were only a few candles in the house. Colonel Norris was obliged to send to Cadiz. The shopkeepers had to be aroused, and the case explained, before they would deign to sell candles at two o'clock in the morning. Finally, when every candle in Cadiz had been purchased and transferred to the farmhouse, the searching party started forth. They headed for the mouth of the cave, which was some three miles distant, and just beyond Cadiz.

"Why did we not think of coming to Cadiz, all of us in a body, getting the candles, and then go straight on to the cave," remarked Captain Bisherig, germanically, as they passed through the excited village. "We should have saved the amount of time consumed in bringing the candles from Cadiz to the farm, and in our coming from the farm to Cadiz. . . . Haste is always slow."

"Then you must be quick as lightning," reasoned Captain Malepeste.

It was a motley procession. The posse of neighbors, with Pap at their head, formed the silent van-

guard. The honest men were on foot. Next came Colonel Norris and his entire household, with the exception of Catherine, his invalid wife. Doctor Alvin, on Icarus, Susan's horse, led the main army. The Doctor's rifle lay suggestively across the pommel of his saddle. The look on his face seemed correlated with what the rifle suggested. Doctor Alvin kept his eyes glued on Squire Campbell's back; and to judge by Pap's nervousness, he felt the Doctor's eyes. Lucile rode Daredevil; Captain Malepeste, his usual mount; Colonel Norris, an English jumper; Captain Bisherig and Gertrude went in a trap. The rear-guard consisted of a two-horse wagon, loaded with yellow candles and ashy-faced darkies — the latter, remembering ghost stories for their sins.

At Cadiz they crossed the railroad track and entered the black forest, under which the still blacker cave spread out, in its thousands of tortuous ramifications. Before entering the forest, they had seen streaks of dawn in the East. But a forest has neither East, West, North, nor South — only a zenith, which is visible from time to time through a

hole that perchance the lightning has made. And the zenith, when they saw it, was still black—a black patch, on the black foliage, pinned with a star. Dead leaves, the surge of the eternal woods, clattered at their feet. Night birds exchanged signals, like the robbers that they were. . . .

Then Pap said:

“Hist!”

“Who you be?” asked Buck.

The vanguard had run plump into a two-horse wagon—or rather into a two-mule wagon, and the questions had been addressed to the driver.

“I’se a common country nigger,” replied the driver of the wagon.

“What you doin’ here this time o’ night?” queried the vanguard.

“Why, Boss, it’s mos’ day,” corrected Jehu, pleasantly showing two rows of white teeth.

“That ain’t what we done axed you,” explained the vanguard.

“What’d you done axed me,” inquired the white teeth.

“We axed you what you’s doin’.”

"Me?... I's haulin' mushrooms. What's you doin'?"

"We ain't done axed you to ax us what we was doing," responded the vanguard.

Then they resumed the cross questioning of Jehu:

"Who's that ther' pusson on the seat by you?"

"Thiss her cullud pusson?" queried Jehu, turning his white teeth toward an indistinct bundle of something which sat bolt upright beside him, in the gloom.

"Yes, that ther' pusson."

"Why, God A'mighty, Boss...."

Jehu laughed loud and long.

"Lord sakes, Boss, she's my ol' woman."

"What's she doin' here with you this time o' night?"

"She ain't doin' nothin', Boss, but gruntin'. She's got right smart misery."

"Then why ain't she at home?"

"I's takin' her to see the doctor."

"We thought you was haulin' mushrooms!"

"Look, 'a here, Mr. Man," observed Jehu,

changing his tactics, "if you's Kuklux, jist say so an' be done with it; if you ain't, if you's 'spectable folks, gimme 'nuf room to pass that ther' sapling with my off front wheel, an'.... gee, whoa, come up, Finis! git up, Plug!...."

But the honest men, who constituted the vanguard, had good reason to be suspicious of any one that travelled at three o'clock in the morning through the trackless forest. Accordingly Finis and Plug, the two wearied mules, neither came up nor got up—a man clung to the bridle of each mule. Two men had jerked Jehu from his seat. One had gone after the silent "ol' woman".... and caught a Tartar. She had knocked him from the wagon, with the butt of a rifle, and fired once, before half a dozen hands had seized the barrel of the weapon and wrenched it from her.

The strongest of these hands, and the one that kept the rifle was Pap's. No sooner had Squire Campbell touched the lock of the newly acquired fire-arm, than he cried to his astonished neighbors:

"Git back there, every one of you.... Don't tich that lady!"

Squire Campbell had recognised his own repeating rifle, which had disappeared with Susan in the cave. Pap's lynx-like eyes had also noted the "ol' woman's" dimly outlined stature, her manner of dealing a blow — and he recalled Susan, as she had struck Mr. Turnbull and grappled with the Countess.

"Kur.... Kur.... Colonel Norris," called back Pap, stammering piously, "praise Gawd, we's found your daughter, an'.... an'.... an' she ain't dead by a long shot!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THEY praised God loudest in nigger dialect — led by Jehu, also in English, in French, and even in German, which some maintain the Lord does not understand. They praised God, all the motley host — the moonshiners, the niggers, the gentry, and the poor white trash. And they lit their candles. . . .

There sat Susan, bolt upright on the wagon seat. She was as grave as an angel. She smiled like a trained nurse — at twenty-five dollars a week. She motioned them away, all save Icarus, who would not be motioned. As she patted the horse's head, Susan remarked:

"We haven't any time to lose. . . . I have a man in there who is bleeding to death."

"What man?" asked Doctor Alvin, who was standing on the hub of one of the wagon wheels.

"A man. . . . a man named Stone," replied Susan.

Colonel Norris remembered a package of letters. He recalled a blunt man, who was as big as he was blunt, but an honest man, Colonel Norris felt sure. Colonel Norris thought too for just an instant of his millions, which he had wrenched from Australia; but before he could sigh, he remembered Julia and the fears he had felt for Susan's destiny. Colonel Norris, therefore, saw fit to smile....

"Why, I know Mr. Stone," exclaimed Pap.

By this time Squire Campbell, through sheer happiness, had emptied the flasks of several neighbors, and had begun to talk like a Christian.

"I know Mr. Stone. He made me a present of this rifle.... What's the matter with him?"

"I cut him," replied Susan. "He has lost at least a quart of blood."

Turning to Doctor Alvin, Susan continued:

"I wish you would get into the wagon and examine Mr. Stone...."

Doctor Alvin was counting the pulse of the unconscious man....

Doctor Alvin was as pale as Mr. Stone....

Only Colonel Norris knew the significance of the haggard look on the old physician's face.

Colonel Norris prayed, as Doctor Alvin counted. He prayed first for his daughter's happiness; and then he prayed that God might temper the wind in some gentle way to this old man, who, shorn now of his dreams, saw in the future only a repetition of the past.

"Where's the wound?" asked the dreamless old man.

"Upper arm, — artery."

Susan gave the name of the artery. I have forgotten it.

"How long has he been unconscious?"

"About three-quarters of an hour."

"Fortunately I have my case with me," remarked the dreamless old man.

Doctor Alvin smiled as he said "fortunately."

"Is that an injection of strychnine, you are giving?" asked Susan.

"Yes."

"How much?"

"One to three."

"Isn't that too much?"

"No. The heart is very weak."

"Respiration?"

"Fair."

"Drive on," commanded Susan, of Jehu.

To Doctor Alvin:

"Won't you please keep your hand on his pulse?
I should hate to lose. . . . my first patient."

"You'll not lose him, child," replied Doctor Alvin.

Baritone Bill whispered to Pap:

"Ax her why she done cut him."

"'Tain't none of our business," whispered back Pap. "We ain't got nothin' to do with who she cuts and why she cuts him."

"But, golly, ain't she a blister," communicated Bill to Pap. "Buck's got a swellin' on his head, where she caught him with the butt of that gun, so he can't put his hat on!"

"An' I've got a hole in my hat, where she shot," volunteered Pap, in a whisper; "but all that ain't none of our business."

"I believe you," whispered back Bill, "we don't know nothin' 'bout nothin'."

And to prove his ignorant light-heartedness, William, the Baritone, caught up the only song he knew: "John Brown's body lays a mold'rin' in the grave, as we go marchin' on."

Everybody joined in....

The slowly moving wagon; the lighted candles; the gloomy forest; the lugubrious chanting of the moonshiners; the set features of Mr. Stone, lying face upward on a bed of straw in the wagon; Doctor Alvin's priest-like face, as he bent over the unconscious man.... the whole scene, I had witnessed once before, in a land where they graciously bury you at the dead of night, wearing hoods over their faces — and their spades.

"John Brown's body lays a mold'rin' in the grave,
John Brown's body lays a mold'rin' in the ground,
John Brown's body lays a mold'ring in the grave,
As we go marchin' on."

Little did John Brown dream of the manner of his immortality. Like Dagobert, he gave a song to

his nation. He took "Jeff" Davis's place on the Southern apple tree.

"We'll hang John Brown on a sour apple tree,
We'll hang John Brown on a sour apple tree,
We'll hang John Brown on a sour apple tree,
As we go marchin' by."

They passed from underneath the black forest, and found a rosy dawn awaiting them. They also found at the station the morning train, which had just pulled panting in.

"If I had a had them ther' mushrooms," mused Jehu, philosophically, "I spec' I'd a had 'nuf time to git 'em on the train."

The train blocked their passage. They must wait until it pulled out. But the moonshiners kept on hanging John Brown—to the astonishment of the sleepy passengers.

"Where are we?" called out a passenger, to the conductor.

"Cadiz, Kentucky."

"What are those people 'doing?"

"Lynching niggers," replied the conductor.

And he was just crying "aw-law-bowd," when

two gray shadows, moving swiftly, like the shadows of two fleeing clouds, glided in from the woods, as out of the night; and on reaching the little square window of the lonely station, one of the shadows sang:

"Tickets.... tickets, please! Two for New York...."

The voice was a tenor.

Everybody heard.

Susan had already told her story, rightly placing the blame of her abduction on the Countess.

"Tickets, please...."

"I'll be goldarned!" whispered Bill to Pap, both of whom had recognised Mr. Turnbull's voice, "I'll be goldarned!"

"Good night Sarepta," said Pap to himself, but looking in the direction of the heavily-veiled Countess.

Then he replied to Bill:

"Yes, I know, but that ain't none of our business either."

"Naw," returned Bill, "we don't know nothin' 'bout nothin'."

"Tickets, please. . . ."

Lucile sighed when she heard the voice — for such is the nature of woman.

But Susan, who had been brought up like a man, felt the pulse of her patient.

The locomotive shrieked joyfully. The long train shook itself, trembled, bounded, disappeared — carrying another of my dreams away.

The procession crossed the railroad track, and started toward the farmhouse.

"Where's Pete?" asked Bill.

"Buryin' Pup," replied Pap.

Said Buck:

"Let's put out our candles."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BUT they were lighted again that evening in the farmhouse — and Mr. Stone still slept.

“He must have been completely exhausted before before the accident happened,” explained Doctor Alvin.

“Hadn’t we better wake him?” asked Susan.
“He ought to take some nourishment: his pulse is weak.”

“I doubt if we could rouse him by ordinary means,” replied Doctor Alvin; “and a violent shock, while bringing him to, for a moment, would only make him weaker afterward. Let him sleep. He still has a large amount of vitality to draw upon. He has lost blood, but not tissue. A man of his proportions can stand a great deal.”

“But how long are you going to let him sleep?”

“Until his pulse is stronger. Nature is slowly converting reserve tissue into strength. When she

has partly restored the strength he has lost, we'll step in and restore the tissue — with chicken broth."

"Then he ought to have some broth just as soon as his pulse is a little stronger. . . ."

"Yes. But I hardly think that will be before to-morrow morning. It's going to take another twelve hours to bring him around. . . ."

"And now, child, you are going to bed! You are worn out. Malepeste and Bisherig will take turn about sitting up. They will call me if he stirs; and he will stir just as soon as he is strong enough to move — or swallow broth. Good-night! I'll go downstairs and send Bisherig. Hadn't you better kiss me good-night?— I've worked pretty hard over your patient."

Susan was thinking of chicken broth. She kissed her guardian, absently. When he had gone, she straightened the sheet over the ample proportions of her patient, and stood a moment looking at his dimly outlined form. . . .

She thought of Michael Angelo's unfinished statues: the sheet was marble, the lines swept with

dreamy vagueness — suggesting but not expressing form. And her patient's pale face completed the resemblance to a sculptor's dream. A dead face bears the imprint of life's ruling passion. Mr. Stone's face suggested pathetic loneliness — this unspeakable loneliness of the soul which great artists, unawares, stamp as a seal upon their masterpieces. This is what attracts you in a masterpiece, not the workmanship. Back of what you see and admire is a loneliness which you feel, and which you would try to comfort: over every masterpiece floats a pale forehead you would kiss....

"He looks as if he'd wanted so much and had so little," murmured Susan. "Poor dear...."

And Humanity's debt to Timothy Stone was credited by: *Kisses*, one (1).

"Yes, I'm going straight to bed," she promised Captain Bisherig, when the latter appeared.

But she first went to the kitchen to see about chicken broth.

"You'll be sure to tell me if he stirs?"

"Of course! But I thought you were in bed!" protested Captain Bisherig, through the half-open

door, to an angel in white with streaming yellow hair.

“I was.... I am.... You’ll tell me?”

“Natürlich.”

But that chicken broth — *was* it keeping warm?

Down to the kitchen descended the angel.

“He’s so hungry.... He looks so hungry....

Poor dear!”

Had he stirred?

And back she soared.

Up and down went the angel, ascending and descending — like those Jacob saw on the ladder in his dream — up and down throughout the livelong night. Then as she peeped into the sick-room for the hundredth time, a sound of snoring froze her blood....

Was Maly actually asleep?

Captain Malepeste had long since relieved Captain Bisherig.

She listened.

Yes, Captain Malepeste was snoring.

It was shameful!

“And nobody to see if *he* stirs! Maybe he *has* stirred! Maybe he is stirring!”

She went to see....

No. But his pulse was stronger. He was *going* to stir right away!

The angel swooped down to the kitchen, and returned with chicken broth.

Captain Malepeste snored on, apparently thinking of Lucile: a little smile played sleepily about the Captain's mouth.

“Maly looks so.... so comfortable, I hate to wake him!”

Accordingly the angel folded her wings, sat down by the bed, and held the chicken broth ready....

“He'll be dazed when he comes to, he won't know me: so it doesn't make any difference,” pleaded the angel, with her night robe.

Her hair grew yellower and yellower as dawn stole through the windows. Night retreated to her eyes.

And his pulse became stronger and stronger....

She held the spoon ready....

Captain Malepeste still snored — and smiled.

Mr. Stone lay on his side. . . .

"Oh!"

Susan jumped, spilling a little of the broth.

Wasn't that eye open! — that gray-blue eye which was half covered by the pillow!

No, it seemed to be closed; but Susan was sure she had seen it open. Her patient, however, stirred neither hand nor foot; and Captain Malepeste still snored.

"I'd better watch that eye," she concluded.

And she concentrated her gaze on the pillow-protected eye. Its lid trembled, she thought, and did not fit so closely as that of the honest, unprotected eye.

"There's something the matter with the eye in the pillow," decided Susan.

She set the broth down and knelt by the bed, that she might examine the suspicious eye. As she knelt, her hair showered — a golden mist — over the face of her patient. She brushed her hair aside, leaned closer — but!

"Oh!"

She was looking straight into the wide-open eyes of her. . . . patient.

She saw a gray-blue veil, thin as ether, and back of this she saw.... she felt.... she plunged into a fathomless space — into the soul of Timothy Stone. It was deep as an ocean, but lit to the brightness of a summer sky by flashing love — which flashed for her. She saw her image everywhere she looked. She felt her thoughts spelled out in language softly sweet; and to the dim outlines of her own incomplete longings, others surged up in this enchanted world, came to meet, and mingled with her own, then drifted off together — a completed whole, a realised desire....

She had found the realm where she was queen....

And he *must* have stirred....

His arms were about her neck, and tangled in her hair....

Her face touched his....

Paid in full, Humanity's debt to Timothy Stone.

"Mes enfants," whispered Captain Malepeste, "don't forget the chicken broth."

THE END.

Au Rendez-Vous des Locomotives, June, 1905.



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